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Vol. I

{ COMPLETE. }

FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 18 ROSE STREET, N. Y.
August 23, 1879.

Subscription Price \$2.50 per year.

{ PRICE }

5 CENTS.

No. 151

Red Leary, the Bill-Poster; OR, The Murder on the Pier.

BY COL. ROBERT LENNOX.

- Author of "Nero, the Hunchback," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

MIDNIGHT ON THE EAST RIVER PIER—THE MURDER AND ROBBERY—THE RIVER-THIEVES—RED LEARY—"JACK BRANDON LIVES, WHOEVER ELSE MAY GO DOWN IN THE DARK WATERS."

"I've been cuffed and kicked enough. What's the use of standing it any more? I'm nothin' but a ragamuffin anyhow, and nobody cares whether I'm up and

East River pier upon which he had been standing, toward the string-piece at the upper side.

Jack Brandon, as he placed his foot upon the string-piece, paused and looked down into the inky blackness beneath.

"It's only to take a 'header' and—"

"St—"

The sudden dropping of an oar in a boat directly beneath him at the side of the pier startled Jack from his intent.

"It's either a police-boat or river thieves. I'll wait."

He heard the men grasping the piles of the pier, and pulling the boat along toward the shore line.

"Easy, now," he heard one of the boatman mutter, hoarsely; "don't let her strike. If there's an infernal cop or watchman within a block of here they'll hear it. Sh—"

Then another voice—that of a younger man:

"Now they're out from beneath, and I can take my last dive," said Jack.

Again he stretched out his arms.

"They'll find my hat and they'll—"

At that moment, when he was once more about to take the fatal spring, a hand was laid heavily upon his shoulder.

"Hello, my covey, what's the row. Where the devil are you going? What are you up too, eh?"

Jack in the darkness could just see that the person before him and whose hand was still upon his shoulder was not much older than himself, judging by his voice, but seemed he to have the strength of an athlete.

"Let me loose," cried Jack. "Who are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm nobody. I've got a dozen names. Which 'll you have? Your broadcloth chaps call me a vagabond; the police, a loafer, and my chummies on the piers know me as Red Leary."



"Drink it or I strike!" said Red Leary, as with upraised club he stood before the trembling wretch.

movin' or down and dyin'. I've a notion to—yes I will—I'll drown myself. As he said this he threw off his almost rimless felt hat, and through the gloom of the December midnight rushed from the center of the

"Why not take the swag to the kitchen—there we can run it in safe, eh?"

There was no answer to this. The men continued pulling the boat toward the intended landing-place.

"Red Leary?"

"That's it, my covey. So now come away back here where I can throw a little light on you—eh?"

"No, no, I won't; leave me to my fate."

Jack turned suddenly and leaping from the string-piece, grappled with his new found acquaintance.

"Good," exclaimed Red Leary. "You've got pluck. But you're not enough for me. I've had a dinner to day, and you haven't."

The struggle between the two was brief. Red Leary was by far the stronger, and he succeeded in forcing Jack away from the edge of the string-piece, and back toward the centre of the pier.

"Stop," said Jack, weak, and almost breathless, "I'll give up."

"What, trying to get the best of me or of your idea of jumping off the dock?"

"Both."

"Good boy, come here."

Jack walked with him unresistingly to the pile of chains.

Save the faint sound of their footsteps, the silence on the pier was as profound as the darkness that surrounded them.

Red Leary brought his lantern out from behind the place where he had left it.

"You see, my jolly waterman," said Leary, "isn't this snug? I hid it here because when I came just here, I heard a boat oar drop, and I knew the boys were coming in from a forage on the river."

"Yes, I heard them—thieves that they are."

"Praps, but that ain't what they calls themselves," said Red Leary. "But take a drink out of this bottle. If it hadn't been for that oar dropping, you'd have been down among the sculpins, agoin' out with the tide. Hark!"

The sound of voices came faintly to their hearing.

"It's the river thieves," said Jack.

"Be quiet. Listen!"

The sound came from the head of the pier—nearly opposite where they were sitting.

They could hear distinctly the noise of the boat rubbing against the spiles beneath the pier.

"They're going to land. They've made a haul. I'll investigate their little game. You stay here—while I creep over toward that corner. Maybe it'll turn up something good for me—for us, water bird," whispered Red Leary, and in a moment he had crept away in the darkness, and Jack was free to drown himself or not as he liked.

But for the time, the idea of rushing to his death had left his mind.

"Red Leary can live and be jolly in his poverty. Why shouldn't I? I've tried honesty and starvation: now I'll do anything that will give me food and strength and clothes. If I shorten my life, it shall be by placing it in the keeping of the hangman. Yes, yes, henceforth woe, woe, not for me, but for all others."

He stood out from behind the chains and listened.

"I'll take Red Leary's light with me. It's worth something. Ha!"

There were footsteps approaching.

Whoever the man was, he was coming straight down the pier.

"It may be Leary," thought Jack. "If it isn't, perhaps luck has brought a customer in my way for me to begin on."

Nearer, nearer came the sound of the footsteps.

"It's a bad fate that leads him towards me if he is—be firm my heart; be quick my arm; to hesitate a moment is to lose."

Jack, reckless of the result, prepared to spring upon the strange intruder upon the deserted pier.

To make sure of his prey he lifted the slide of the lantern.

The man was near him. He carried in his hand a small satchel.

At this moment Jack, by the light of the lantern, caught sight of a stick lying directly in front of him.

As yet the stranger had not seen Jack. He only saw the open lantern and in the darkness behind it mistook Jack for one of the posts of the pier.

That mistake was fatal to him.

For at that instant Jack grasped the stick and with terrible certainty of aim struck the man upon the head.

The blow was murderous, yet it did not silence the victim.

He staggered, dropped upon his knees, and then fell back upon the frozen ground of the pier.

"Oh villain! help! murder! thieves! Help! help! Police!"

"Shut up or I'll murder you!" cried Jack, making a desperate clutch at the satchel which the man held in his hands with a death grip.

The man, notwithstanding the fearful blow he had received, and with the blood streaming over his face, held fast to the satchel with one hand, while with the other he vainly tried to defend himself.

"Murder! help! police!"

Another awful blow of the stick stretched him out motionless and silent.

The hand relaxed its hold upon the satchel

CHAPTER II.

A BATTLE IN THE DARKNESS—THE TERRIBLE DEATH OF REDMOND, THE POLICEMAN—THAT'S TWO OF US.

The blow was scarcely given, and Jack's hand had but just grasped the satchel, when Red Leary, as if he had risen from the ground, confronted him.

"Hello; what game is this by the light of my lantern and—with my stick too? Ah, scoundrel! It's a robber whom I saved from the fishes, in order that he might commit another murder, eh? Help! help!" cried Red Leary, rushing at Jack.

"Silence, fool. Silence if you cling to life!" exclaimed Jack.

"Help—help!" repeated Red Leary, still attempting to grasp Jack.

Suddenly stepping aside Jack swung the stick around and aimed a murderous blow at Leary.

True to his intent it fell crashing upon his face, knocking him down beside the already senseless stranger.

"The noise is down on that pier!"

"Somebody's being murdered!"

These exclamations came to the ears of Jack.

"Quick! I've no time to lose or my new life will end where it begins—it is the police."

Taking up the satchel, and giving the lantern a kick, he hurried away up the pier.

Luckily for him those who heard the cries for help had in the darkness mistaken the pier, so that the way for his escape was clear.

Running along close to the pier heads for a few minutes, he suddenly darted across the street, and then paused under a lamp upon the sidewalk.

There was no sign of pursuit.

He hastily forced the satchel open and searched it.

From it he drew forth a package of bank notes.

"Hundred dollar bills—a thousand dollar bill. Here's luck."

He thrust the bills back into the satchel.

"Henceforth I live. Jack Brandon lives, whoever else may go down to death in the river."

Then with one parting glance into the darkness through which he had come, he turned up the nearest street and was gone.

Meanwhile Red Leary speedily recovered from the effects of the blow he had so unexpectedly received, and regained his feet.

"That blow would have killed anybody but a Leary," he muttered. "As it is I don't feel very comfortable about the head. Oh, there's my lantern."

He took it up.

"What a wretch, he's broken my lantern too. Ha—the man is alive."

The victim upon the ground partly raised one of his arms. It fell again nerveless.

Red Leary stooped beside him and held the light of the battered lantern up to his face.

"My—brother—my home—I—I am dying!" he faintly gasped.

"Dying—quick; my poor man, tell me your name?"

"In—the—the-right—pocket-book," came feebly from the trembling, pallid lips.

Gently, but quickly, Red Leary made the search and found the pocketbook.

"In that pocketbook—give it —," the man's utterance ceased.

A shudder of the frame, a contraction of the limbs and all was over.

Red Leary started up.

"The wretch has killed him. I've taken the trouble to hinder a scoundrel from drowning himself that he might kill an honest man. Hark! I hear voices—the police; always too late. I'll be off. There's no good to be had in company of the dead. But if ever I run afoul of that wharf-rat again, I'll —"

A sudden gust of wind blew out the lantern.

Thrusting the dead man's pocket-book into his pocket, he hurried off up the pier.

As he left the head of the pier three or four policemen passed in upon it from the street.

As they did so, in the darkness, these were gliding like specters from the foot or end of the pier, as one by one they climbed over the string-piece—four men.

"Tread like cats," whispered one of them to the others, "or we'll be in a trap we won't get out of."

"We're in it now," was the reply. "The police boat is behind us, and there's the police coming down the pier."

"Sh! They'll not see us, for they're not after us. Danger behind us is worse than danger in front."

"Cussed if I keef fer havin' it anywhere near me," growled the leader.

On they crept, hugging close to the side, while towards them, down the center of the pier, came the policeman.

"I'll swear the noise was on this pier."

"Maybe 'twas some of them infernal pirates having it out in a quiet way."

"Ah, ha!" cried one of the officers.

"Open that glim, quick!"

"It's a murder."

The policeman stood beside the dead man.

"Knocked on the head with a club. See, here's the stick. Hold that glim here."

One of the policeman held the light as ordered.

"They've cleaned him out, gone plumb through him."

"And here's a lantern, the candle wick still soft."

"One of you run to the station. Take the club and the lantern with you, tell the sergeant to send a stretcher."

The policeman who took the lantern and stick started swiftly up the pier toward the street.

The four river thieves passed the little group of officers without discovery, but at the head of the pier, they were suddenly discovered by the returning policeman.

The moment he saw them he gave the alarm.

The next instant, before he could utter a second cry, they were upon him.

Four to one was an unequal fight at the best.

"You infernal murdering scoundrels," muttered the officer, struggling to free himself from the ruffians. "Help! help!"

"That yelp is your last!"

A hand as of iron grasped him by the throat, and pressed him backward.

"His pals are coming," cried one of the men.

"Fling him into the river."

"That won't do. Give him a twister and drop him."

The policeman's companions were now but a little distance off.

They were guided towards him solely by the sound of his voice when he uttered his last cry for help.

"Scoop him—they're upon us?" cried one of the four men.

"Into the river, Dan."

"Knock him on the head."

"I'll heave him overboard," said one of the ruffians.

They were within a few feet of the edge of the pier. With a powerful effort, the man who held the officer hurled him forward toward the edge.

He fell across the string-piece, his body evenly balanced for an instant.

With a wicked push of his foot, the ruffian destroyed the balance, and the dazed officer fell with a splash into the dark waters.

A cry of mortal agony rang out upon the night air from his lips as he struck the water.

Then it was that his companions, the remaining officers came up, only in time to hear the splash, the cry, and the sound of the flying feet of the ruffians disappearing in the darkness.

They stood looking down into the blackness below. No sound came to them from their lost comrade.

The cold December wind blew colder and the darkness seemed to hang lower and heavier and press the darkness down closer and thicker over and around the group of officers, over the body of the murdered man and over the black waters to crush out all sense of life or life.

"Poor Redmond—he's gone!" said one of the policemen.

"The ruffians!"

"Hark! don't you hear a splash—that's him!"

"No, it's oars. It's a boat. Sh! It is not coming in either. It's going out. More than one pair of oars, and they're going fast too. It isn't the police boat."

"No."

Just then, as he spoke a light suddenly gleamed out not five hundred yards out upon the river.

The light was in a boat.

It shone across the dark waters only for an instant.

Then it disappeared.

"River rats, by all that's wise," said one of the policemen.

"Poor Redmond," said one of them. "He's the second of our precinct that's lost his life on this infernal death trap of a pier."

"And he'll not be the last one I'm thinkin', with that gang of cut-throats are hung up in the Tombs' yard."

"I've sworn that the next one of these wretches who comes within the reach of my club 'll die with a crushed head law or no law."

So conversing, and with one more and a last fruitless glance over the edge of the pier into the darkness below, they turned sorrowfully away to fulfil their duty.

CHAPTER III.

RED LEARY MEETS THE BROTHER OF THE MURDERED—MAN—THE REVELATION—THE ACCUSATION—THE POCKET-BOOK—"I'LL KEEP IT."

"WELL, I might as well give up and go under. Nothing pays me, and as for that I pay nothing. If I was a pickpocket or a sneak thief or one of them river pirates I'd get along famously. The chap that rides honesty rides a starving hoss as'll die under the saddle and leave his rider in the ditch. Let me see—it's three months—since I saved that murdering rascal's life on the pier from drowning only that he might rob and kill a man and git away with his plunder. I wonder if he got anything. Ah, of course he did."

The speaker was Red Leary, and it was himself only to whom he was talking.

He was sitting at a rickety table in the garret which he called his home, in James Street.

On the table were a few broken dishes, part of a loaf of bread and two or three clay pipes.

The ceiling was low and like the walls, cracked and darkened with the smoke and grim of years. A little square window admitted a doubtful light, while opposite it the battened door with its rusty iron-bolt in lieu of a lock or latch comprised the only means of egress.

In the far corner of this cramped sort of lodging was the bed partly concealed by an old ragged coverlid which hung in front of it.

The only and scanty heat of the place came from a skeleton stove, upon which simmered and steamed a battered tea-kettle.

"I wonder what came of that murderous vagabond," said Leary, still conversing with himself, and rubbing a pipe as he did so. "He must have disappeared as quietly as I did. Left the city possibly. Maybe—made a haul. But what could the fellow he knocked on the head have been doing on the pier at that late hour—with money or vallybles about him? It's a mystery, and I don't b'lieve I'll have any better luck at gittin' on the inside track of mysteries than I have anything else. His name—hang it—I never can keep it in my head. It's well I've got it in the pocket-book, which he gave me as he died, and which I've carried ever since. Let me see—let me see—when I'm alone I'm always thinking of it—let me see."

He took the pocketbook from his pocket, and opened it.

From among the papers in it he drew out an old worn bit of card.

"I've worn it out with handling," said Leary.

"Didier, Joe Didier, that's the name. Poor fellow, it ain't of use to him now. He's safe enough in Potters' Field. This pocketbook, all its papers; well, they may lead to something. There goes my pipe, I'll—"

There came a knock at the door.

Leary arose from the stool upon which he was sitting.

"Who in Satan's name is that, I wonder?"

in."

The door opened as Leary drew back the bolt.
"Come in. Hello! well, you give a big knock for so small a kid."

"Of course," said the new comer, looking up. "Why shouldn't I? Are you the Leary?"

"The Leary? Now that is rich; of course I am, specially when there's no Leary about. What d'ye want, youngster?"

"You post bills, eh?"

"Yes, I post bills eh, and I'm ready for any other kind of job that's likely to turn up in an honest way."

Leary reseated himself and lighted a fresh pipe.

"Go on with your fairy tale," he added.
"Then I will give you my message. The man I work downr. Garouse, sent me to you. He wants you—on the bill-poster."

"Garouse, the rich man—banker, nob and high swell in the avenue. You work for him, kid?"

"Yes, of course."

"Run errands?"

"Yes."

The new comer, the boy, not over sixteen but looking much older now stood near Leary so that the full light of the little square window fell upon his face.

Leary glanced at the boy, and started back so suddenly that his pipe dropped from his fingers.

"That face—almost the very counterpart of—boy," cried Leary, "who are you?"

The boy shrank back for the moment.

"Don't be afraid, my kid, but, your face, as you stand there is the face of one I saw only once, and then it was in the darkness of midnight, and dying."

"It wasn't me. It might have been my brother—but he wasn't dying I guess. He ran away from his boss's store, merchants they were, with a big pile of money—at least that's what they say—but I don't believe a word of it."

"They say—eh?"

Leary was silent a moment in thought.

"Run away, eh? What's their names?"

"Poland, Brown & Co., over in Burling Slip. He was secretary for them."

"One afternoon last December."

"Yes, yes!"

Mr. Poland sent him with ten thousand dollars to deliver it to Captain Seaweed Reefer on board the ship *Harlem*.

"Yes—well—he never came back?"

"He has never been seen since," said the boy sadly.

"What time did he leave Poland's store?"

"At five o'clock; he had the money in a satchel."

"And at midnight he was murdered on the pier next to that at which the *Harlem* was lying."

The boy's cheek blanched.

"Twasn't my brother."

"Did he ever reach the vessel?"

"No. The captain expected a messenger from Mr. Poland, but none came."

"Where did your brother live?"

"He and I had a room together. We were alone in the world. He got me my place with Mr. Garouse."

"Your brother's name was Joseph Didier?"

The boy uttered a cry of astonishment. Leary placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"Your name is Didier?" added Leary.

"Yes, yes, Charles Didier."

Then briefly, but clearly, Leary told the boy the story of the murder on the pier, and all the little he knew concerning the assassin and robber.

The boy covered his face with his hands and cried as if his heart would break.

In a few moments he lifted up his head.

There were no more tears falling from his eyes. There had come over his face in that brief time a cold, stony look—the look of a mask.

"It must have been my brother," said Charles Didier, "and he is dead. When I came into this garret to see you I was a boy with a boy's mind. I go from it still a boy, but with a man's will to hunt down the murderer of my brother. I'll avenge his death as surely as I am here!"

"Pshaw, my boy—nonsense! I'm sorry I told you anything."

"Leary, you will help me in this, won't you?"

"If I can, but my luck is always agin' me. But I'll keep an eye out for you. See here."

Leary took out the pocketbook.

"That was my brother's. I can tell you—"

"What was in it, you wanted to say. I'll keep this, my boy. It may be useful to me."

Charles Didier looked at him suspiciously.

"Give it to me," he said.

"Oh, no—that wouldn't do."

"Why not? It isn't yours. It belonged to my brother."

"And belongs to you now, but I prefer to keep it, and its contents."

"Because you perhaps had a hand in my poor brother's murder," cried the boy with a sudden burst of passion. "I see now—you—you."

"Don't act like a lunatic, my kid," said Leary, coolly. "I'll keep the pocketbook, and you'll thank me for it in the end."

Charles Didier's mind had at that moment but one thought. It came upon him like a flash.

Had Leary given him the pocketbook he would never have entertained it.

His fury arose like a tempest.

"You are the murderer of my brother!" he cried, and as he uttered the words he made a sudden rush at Leary to clutch the pocketbook.

His hand grasped it, but Leary caught his wrist in a grip like that of a vise.

"Foolish boy!" said Leary. "If I were a murderer I should dash your brains out as easily as the assassin did your poor brother's. Now, then, behave yourself. Go back to Garouse, tell him I will see him in an hour from this. Do you come here again this time to-morrow,

and we'll maybe strike upon a plan to work out the detection of this murder."

The calmness of Leary had its effect.

Charley Didier after one more appeal for the pocketbook assented to Leary's proposal.

"But remember," said Charley, as he left, "wherever my brother's murderer is, I will bring him to the hangman even though I do not kill him as I would a dog myself."

"Right, my boy. Stick to it."

And Leary was again alone.

He lit his pipe.

"A brave solid boy that. I like him. He will give himself no rest till he ferrets out that wretch. He still thinks I am the murderer. I read it in his eye, as he went out."

He refilled his pipe and lit it.

"Joseph Didier left Poland's store at five o'clock for the ship. He was murdered on the pier at midnight. Now, where was he all the long seven hours between five and twelve o'clock? That's a riddle which only the dead brother brought back to life can solve. I can't, that's certain. Ten thousand dollars. Phew! what a stake. It's too much to think of. I'll go to Garouse's, and see what his job is."

In a few moments Leary had fastened his garret door with the padlock on the outside and was on his way to Garouse's.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM GAROUSE'S TO THE "DEATH SLIP"—THE ROUGH MAN AT THE DOOR—THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE—THE DIAMOND PARCEL—"PULL OUT."

The job at Garouse's house lasted Red Leary three or four days.

It was inside work, and consisted of helping to move some heavy furniture from one part of the house to the other, and to take up and put down a few carpets in the smaller rooms of the rich banker's mansion.

Meanwhile he had seen Charley Didier but once.

Then the boy scarcely spoke to him, but passed him on the stairs almost as if he had never met him.

"There's trouble brewing in that boy's mind, and it means me," was Leary's thought.

It did mean him.

But whatever his suspicions, it was evident Charley did not, or had not revealed them.

But there was no mistaking one fact.

The boy was terribly in earnest, and had begun his task as a detective—but only for himself.

He had firmly resolved to work out the mystery alone, and through his own ingenuity.

On the evening of the second day of the appearance of Leary in the house of the Banker Garouse, Charley Didier was sent by the banker on a special errand.

To his surprise it was to a shipping-office directly facing the pier upon which Leary had told him his brother was murdered.

Not only that—but to remind him of that terrible night the more forcibly, Garouse gave him a satchel to carry.

"Take this satchel, Charley," said Garouse, "to the Trans Atlantic and general transportation shipping-office, opposite pier seventy-five. It contains some papers and discounts of importance to the firm. They have a key which will open it. They will give you a small parcel which you will bring to me. You will have to wait some time, perhaps, but as soon as you can—return. You will find me in the library."

The raw March wind blew savagely through the street, but the boy bravely faced it, and he hurried on until he reached the corner of the street, facing the pier.

As he glanced toward the rough, darkening waters, that even there he could hear sobbing and swashing against the piers and the shipping, he shuddered.

"What a fate was Joe's," he murmured. "And that was the pier—there in the darkness and cold of that awful night he fell, slain by a merciless wretch, while I, whom he loved so dearly, was sleeping peacefully and safely."

As he murmured this half audibly, a policeman suddenly appeared before him from a doorway.

"Looking for any place?" said he. "Bad night to stop in this neighborhood, my boy."

"I won't stop long—I was looking at the river. How rough it is."

"It's rougher for them as works on it or fall into it."

The policeman bent slightly forward and gave him a sharp look.

"What's wrong about me?" said Charley.

"Oh nothin'. Round here, I want's to know who's who. You know the name of that pier—our name for it?"

"Yes," said Charley shivering.

"Death Slip!" answered the policeman. "Inside of four months two of our men and a stranger were killed on it by the river rats."

"Rats."

"Well, thieves, pirates, if you like them names better. So, but—you'd better skip along or if a stray one of them seeing you with that satchel in your hand happens along he'd like no better fun than to tap you on the head and heave you overboard."

"Poor Joe," said Charley, as he hurried around the corner.

A few steps brought him to the shipping office.

He delivered the satchel.

"Wait half an hour," said the member of the firm who received him, "in the outer office."

As he passed in at the front door he saw a stout, rough-looking man standing near it on the outside.

He resembled a sailor rather than a shore-man, by the light from the office windows.

He apparently took no notice of the boy.

The half hour passed.

"Here is the parcel which you are to give Mr. Garouse," said the clerk, coming out of the inner office.

"Don't lose it."

"What is in it—money?"

"It's valuable, that's all," was the curt reply.

"What is the time, sir?" said Charley, as he turned to go out.

"Nine o'clock."

"Nine."

"Yes, and we ought to have closed up two hours ago. Tell Mr. Garouse he made us keep late hours to-night," added the clerk, laughing.

"I will," said Charley, as he passed out into the darkness, and pulling his coat around him pushed ahead to get around into the better lighted street.

He had almost reached the corner.

He was directly opposite the "Death Slip" pier.

"What a night this is for murder—"

The thought was choked in the utterance.

A cloth was suddenly thrown over his face and drawn tightly around his throat so that the cry of terror that arose to his lips was unheard.

"Silence, or I'll strangle you!" muttered a hoarse voice.

In an instant the parcel was torn from his grasp and he was lifted from his feet and borne rapidly on by two men.

He struggled but he might as well have fought against the wind.

Presently his captors came to a halt.

"Quit, Jim," said one of the men. "The cops'll hear us. Their ears are sharp—here on Death Slip."

"Now, then easy—and if the kid gits wild chuck him overboard, first knockin' 'im on the head so he can dive better."

"Why not do it now?"

"It won't do. There's been too much of that work now, in this region. Beside he ain't worth killin' till we're 'bliged to. Now, then, let him down."

Charley felt himself going down.

He knew that he was placed in a boat, in which two other men were seated.

"Didn't I tell you right," said the one in the boat to the other. "Bob made no mistake. He's bin watchin' old Garouse two days for it."

"And Bob's got the swag!" said the one referred to, as he lowered himself into the boat. "Got it here. It's worth more than a bag full of greenbacks."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes—for it's diamonds."

"Pull out. Jim, watch the kid."

Pushing out from the pier, a moment later the boat shot swiftly out into the darkness of the river.

CHAPTER V.

"THE FIRST SOUND THAT COMES FROM YOUR LIPS WILL BE YOUR LAST."—OVERBOARD TO DEATH.

THROUGH the darkness swiftly sped the boat in which were the ruffians with their captive, toward their appointed landing-place.

Around Charley's head the cloth was still tightly bound, and he lay at their feet in the bottom of the boat, helplessly shivering with cold, and his mind filled with dread as to his fate.

Not a word was uttered by the men after they had pushed out from the pier until they had almost reached their intended destination.

Every inch of the river was as familiar to these men in the darkness as in the light.

When the sound of the splash and dip of distant oars came to their ears, they waited with lifted oars for the moment to catch the direction whence the sounds came.

Then, satisfied once again, the oars in their strong grasp, did their work bravely.

In half an hour, it seemed hours to Charley, he knew by the motion of the oars that they were veering toward the landing.

Which side of the river, or whether up or down the stream, he could not guess.

"Now, then—easy—on a line with that corner light—there—so!" whispered one of the men.

"Catch the cops outside of a shelter such a night as this—not much," said another. "They wouldn't come down to the end of a pier not if they knew they'd bag the whole kit of us."

"Wouldn't they? Don't you take too much stock in that, old Blazer."

"Now then, slow up there—curse it—do you want to stave her bow agin that spile—now."

The boat was at the pier. Carefully the man, reaching out in the darkness catching at the spiles of the piers pulled the boat toward the wharf.

"Once in the kitchen, satan himself will give us a wide berth. Bill, you climb up there, on the pier and see if all's clear over-head. Better sure there's no prying eyes playing cat and mouse with us."

"All right."

Bill, catching at a spile in the corner of the pier nearest the wharf, went up with the agility of a man used to that sort of athletic exercise.

"Are you up?"

"Yes."

"All right?"

"S far as I can see, yes; but, considering I can't see a yard away from my nose, you'd better wait till I skirmish my way up the pier a bit."

"Go ahead."

This man being out of the boat, left but two in it.

These two, one at the stern and the other seated towards the bow, were not particularly inclined to waste time or cool their breath in conversation.

They sat as grim and almost as motionless as wooden images.

For pity's sake loosen my hands—the rope's cutting into the flesh! I feel them bleeding! I— I won't— came from the lips of Charley.

The utterance, though low and muffled by the cloth drawn so tightly over his head, was plainly understood by the man at the stern.

"Shet up! I s'pose you want to jump overboard, er somethin' wus, maybe."

"Pshaw! Blazer. What harm can the kid do? We've got him foul now. Give the chap a chance for comfort," answered the other.

"A chance to yell out and bring the whole army of cops down on us, eh?"

"I won't cry out. I promise I won't speak a word," was the muffled appeal.

"Damn it!" said Blazer. "I'll take the chance of it."

He reached over, and in a moment his hands were at the knots of the cords which were about the cloth, and held it down over his head.

"Kinder cosy nightcap, isn't it?" said the ruffian. "Now, mind, the first sound that comes from your lips will be your last. D'ye understand?"

"Yes, yes; but my hands?"

"I'll tend to that. Now, none of your tricks."

Suddenly the cloth was drawn off, and Charley Didier's head was free.

Then, with some little trouble and swearing over the knot, the ruffian succeeded in releasing his captive's hands.

"There now, sit up and air yourself," said Blazer.

Charley arose stiffly from the bottom of the boat.

His limbs were numbed by the cold and the cramped position into which they had been forced.

His first thought was how to escape.

There were but two men on the boat, but in any struggle, either one of them would be a match for three or four of his strength.

And even admitting that he had the ghost of a chance in such an uneven conflict of freeing himself, there was still another on the pier whom the noise would bring to their aid.

"There is one desperate chance," he said to himself, "and I have half a mind to try it."

As his eyes became familiar to the gloomy surroundings, and he looked about him, he noticed that the oars were lying each side of him.

Blazer, the elder ruffian, was directly behind him, while upon the forward seat sat, with his elbows upon his knees and his head partly resting in his hands, his companion.

Blazer was the nearer of the two, but evidently the more watchful.

The boat lay low in the water, the gunwale not being over four or five inches at midships from the black waters in which it swayed to and fro, as they washed against the pier.

Presently a step was heard overhead.

"Lay quiet, there's a couple of 'em coming down behind me. Don't make a move 'till you hear mesqueak. Then shoot her round into the kitchen."

"Right," was the reply from the boat, so low that only he whom it was intended could have heard it.

The head of the man on the pier disappeared.

The sound of men stepping heavily, walking without any display of caution, was heard.

"Now, now," said Charley to himself. "If I only had the chance. The police so near—I dare not cry out—what else can I do?"

Nearer, nearer came the sound of the footsteps.

One desperate effort, and relief might come.

"Don't you move yer lips, youngster," whispered Blazer, "or this black-jack of mine 'll flatten you out on the instant."

Charley shuddered, then braced himself up.

"I'll try it. If it fails, I'll follow my brother."

One glance forward and then at Blazer, and his plan was determined.

Blazer was sitting upon the stern, his hands apparently resting on his knees.

Suddenly rising and turning, Charley threw himself upon and against Blazer with his whole weight.

The act was so unexpected by the ruffian that the force of the onslaught caused him to lose his balance.

Before he could regain it, before he had time to fairly grapple with his assailant, Charley struck him in the throat with his fist as only a desperate boy can strike.

The blow was succeeded by a push, and the momentary careening of the boat did the rest. And with a vain clutch at the gunwale the ruffian tumbled over in the water.

All this struggle lasted but a moment.

In that moment the man sitting forward seeing Charley's attempt, and at once divining his purpose, sprang up to the assistance of his comrade.

CHAPTER VI.

FREE AT LAST—THE ROPE'S END.

BUT he was too late.

Before he could, in the two steps it took, reach the stern, Blazer had fallen with a dull splash into the river, and Charley had turned and was facing him.

As Blazer toppled over the black-jack—a loaded short club which he had threatened to use upon his victim dropped into the boat.

Charley felt it strike at his feet.

As he faced the remaining ruffian, he stooped for it.

Fortunately his hand touched it, and grasping it, he felt that there was a bare possibility of overcoming the man before him.

As he nerved himself, and at the instant the ruffian was within reach, Charley saw that he had drawn a knife.

Even in the darkness his eye caught the gleam of its murderous blade.

"God help me," he said, "one thrust of that knife, and all will be over."

"You young devil!" hissed the man, as he raised the knife and with the other made a clutch at Charley.

Charley shrank back.

As he did so a pair of hands grabbed the side of the boat; the hands of Blazer from the water, trying to raise himself into the boat.

The weight careened the boat and saved Charley from the thrust aimed at him with the knife.

Charley turned and struck Blazer's hand a blow with the black-jack.

Blazer uttered a howl of pain, loosened his hold, and dropped back into the water.

On the instant Charley sprang forward, and before the man with the knife could recover himself sufficiently Charley leaped upon him, and staking everything upon the chance of a single blow struck the ruffian full upon the temple with the black jack.

The man dropped upon his knees—stunned.

Charley at once pushed him over on the bottom of the boat.

"St!" came from above. "What's the noise about?"

It was the man, Bill, who had once more returned.

Charley made no reply, but grasped the oars.

"What was that splash? anythin' overboard, eh?"

Still the man, Bill, received no answer.

"Blast it, air you all struck dumb. What's up?"

The coast's clear—cops air gone. If they wasn't you'd a had 'em on you hot and heavy. Say, Blazer, what's that splashin' over there?"

Charley thrust one of the bars against the pier and pushed the boat out from it.

The ruffian still lay insensible—dead, for all Charley knew, at the bottom of the boat.

"What in Satan's name is up?" cried the man on the pier.

Charley seated himself and fixed the oars.

"It's my only hope," he said, "and if I can't row, the tide will carry me out."

A few pulls at the oars convinced him that his strength was not equal to the task.

Behind him he heard the splashing in the water of Blazer, who, despite the terrible pain in his hand, continued to keep up.

"Help! help!" cried Blazer.

This cry, and the moving out of the boat satisfied the man on the pier that by some means the captive, Charley, must have effected his rescue, and was escaping.

He ran to the end of the pier upon which stood a little outhouse.

He burst open the frailty-locked door, and entering, came out with a coil of rope.

"Hold on, Blazer; give a yell, so I can know zactly where you are, and I'll throw this rope to you."

"Here!" cried Blazer from the water, "quick, quick—I—I'm go—going—quick!"

Charley heard all this distinctly.

When he ceased rowing—and he had pulled but a few strokes—the boat drifted back toward the shore, for the tide, instead of going out, was coming in.

Between the boat and the pier, and in a direct line, he heard Blazer still struggling in the water.

"Now, then," cried the ruffian on the pier, "Blazer, it's your last chance. Listen when it strikes and catch it if you can."

"Quick—quick!" was the only reply.

Swinging the coil to give it momentum, he threw it out into the darkness, in the direction of the sound of Blazer's voice.

The arm of the ruffian was strong, and the coil flew swiftly through the air.

Strangely enough the end which was knotted struck in the boat, or rather across it directly in front of Charley.

Beneath the sway of the rope, ten yards back of the stern of the boat, Blazer was beneath it, and as it drooped and touched the water he grasped at it.

Again he was doomed to disappointment.

For when the end of the rope fell in front of him Charley caught it up and pulled it partly taut.

Thus for the moment, the escaping victim and one of the ruffians was at either end of the rope.

"Hold on a minute," cried Charley, "don't pull it yet."

"Damme, it isn't Blazer, it's the kid that's in the water," exclaimed the ruffian on the pier. "Well, I'm blowed if I can make head or tail of it."

He was puzzled. Still he heard the splashing and struggle in the water.

But for the darkness he would have known all.

"Hold on till I fasten it," repeated Charley.

As speedily as possible he fastened the rope around the waist of the insensible ruffian at the bottom of the boat.

Having tied it effectually, by the utmost exertion of his strength and very nearly capsizing the boat in doing it, he succeeded in lifting the man over the gunwale and dropping him into the water.

"I'm all right; haul away!" cried Charley.

The ruffian on the pier, puzzled, as he was nevertheless, began hauling in, dragging, as he little imagined toward him, neither Blazer nor his late victim.

"There," cried Charley, "I've the boat to myself, and the chances are all mine!"

"Help! help! damn—" gasped Blazer, and with this last despairing cry he sank beneath the dark surface of the waters into the darker mystery of death.

The ruffian hauled away at the rope hand over hand.

"The kid's a heavy one—if it's him. I'd give a year's swag for an inch or two of clear daylight, just to see what all this is about anyhow."

At last the rope was in at the end, and only its length from the top of the pier to the waters edge intervened between the one above and the one below.

"Can't you help yourself?" cried the ruffian, as he paused to rest a moment. "Maybe he's drowned."

In his attention to his task he had not noticed two men who had approached him and, as he uttered these words, were standing on either side.

"What're you up to, owl?"

He uttered a cry of surprise and started back.

A hand grasped each shoulder,

"None of that. Kinder caught you napping, eh? What're you fishin' for at this time of night?"

"Me—I—I—heard a boy crying for help in the water and I—I threw him a rope and—"

"He's at the end of it, eh? Well, here, Alex, catch hold, now pull—he'll help haul in while I keep an eye on you."

The policeman opened his dark lantern and flashed the light down into the water.

"A boy—oh, ho! But it happens to be a man, dead one," said the officer. "Pull away."

When the body was drawn up and laid on the captured ruffian was more in the dark than ever.

"I'll swear I heard Blazer calling for help; and I'll swear I heard the kid, and now it's neither one nor the other. There's some devil's work in this, surely."

"Yes, and you're one of his imps; so we'll just take you in till we get hold of the old man."

Charley, in the boat, heard distinctly enough what was transpiring on the pier to convince him that he could cry for help with safety.

He did so.

"This is a night of merickels," exclaimed the ruffian, when he heard Charley's cry, just as one of the officers was putting on his wrists a pair of "wrislets."

The tide had floated the boat in still closer to the pier.

"Throw me the rope," he cried.

They did so, and a few moments he was rescued from the boat and hauled up on shore.

The first thing he thought of was the package.

"It is lost—lost—lost," he cried.

The great peril through which he had passed was forgotten for the moment.

"You must accompany us," said one of the officers.

"Cub, where is Blazer?" said the ruffian.

"Under the water, where he ought to be, and you, oo," answered Charley. "You know where that package is?"

"If I do I'll never tell you," he replied with a grin.

Briefly Charley explained his capture, the robbery of the package and the events of his escape, to the officers.

"That sounds straight, but come you, and tell it to the cap'n. I guess you're all right, and so is that one lying there—more right than any of us now—for he's where he can never do wrong again."

CHAPTER VII.

JACK BRANDON ALIAS KENWARD DICKS, IS ONCE MORE FACE TO FACE WITH RED LEARY. "THAT FACE—I HAVE SEEN IT BEFORE—BUT WHERE?"

"So, Leary, you've finished for the day, have you?" said Garouse, as the bill-poster presented himself at the door of the banker's library.

"For the day, yes; for good, yes, too."

"Why there's more for you to do, my man."

"I'm no man's man. I belong to myself, Mr. Garouse. So pay me and let me go."

"You knew this young Didier—eh?"

"Somewhat, yes."

"Umph. His brother strangely disappeared some months ago?"

"Yes."

"And now he has disappeared in the same way."

"No—no—I hope not. It's only last night he went away."

"I sent him away on an errand to the shipping office. From the time of his leaving there with that package all trace of him is lost."

"But that was only last night at nine o'clock. Now it is but ten in the morning. There are a hundred ways to account for his disappearance. He is honest."

"So was his brother, but he has not yet come back."

Leary made no reply to this.

He had a purpose in not revealing to Garouse his knowledge of the fate of Charles Didier's brother.

"Was that package so very valuable?"

"Yes. If he has lost it—"

"It will be found," interrupted Leary.

"Nonsense. Nothing lost is ever found in this great city."

At this instant a servant entered.

"Mr. Garouse, a messenger from police headquarters wishes to see you personally."

"I will see him of course."

The messenger was shown in.

"Well, sir, your business," said Garouse.

"A boy of sixteen—rescued last night from a boat under peculiar circumstances, at one of the East River piers—"

"Well, his name—never mind details now."

"He says his name is Charles Didier."

"Didier?"

"Something like that, sir."

"Where is he?"

"Detained at headquarters sir. You are required there to identify him."

"Was there a valuable package found in his possession?"

"No, sir. He says he was robbed and—"

"That will do. Say that Mr. Garouse will be at the headquarters within half an hour."

"Yes, sir."

The messenger retired.

"You see," said Leary, "the boy is not lost."

"But the package is, and that is worth more to me than a dozen boys."

"Brute!" muttered Leary to himself.

"Come to me this evening, and I will pay you."

"As you please. I'm never particular. The like of me has no right to be, I s'pose. Shall I go?"

"Yes, anytime this evening you can call."

"At six?"

"Yes."

"At six be it. I was born at six in the evening. At six years of age I was left in the streets by my parents, whoever they were; at six o'clock, too, and everything's been at sixes and sevens with me ever since."

"Well, well, go now—I'll pay you liberally—liberally."

"Liberally's a good high-soundin' old word, but now-days it don't mean much. It's like givin' soup to a poor, and them that come first don't git any."

With this parting bit of philosophy Leary went out down the stairs.

"You needn't go out the basement way," said a servant in the hall. "They're a upsettin' the floor and an go out by the front."

"Thankee for your condescension—that's another big word."

The bell rang.

"Whose that, I wonder," said the servant. "Well, I can let you out while I let whoever it is that rang in."

"And kill two birds, of a feather maybe, with one stone," said Leary.

The servant opened the inner and then the outer door.

A man dressed in the height of fashion was standing on the steps.

Leary passed out, and the servant stood in the open doorway.

As he passed out the new-comer looked him full in the face.

Their glances met.

The stranger's face remained calm and unmovable.

But Leary started back as if he had suddenly discovered a serpent in his path.

"That face—that face!" murmured Leary; "I have seen it before—before—"

"Is Mr. Garouse at home?"

"What name, sir?"

"There is my card. I think he will be in—to me!"

The stranger was as calm beneath the stare of Leary, as unmoved by its strange intensity as if the man had been a mile away.

"Kenward Dicks," read the servant. "I'll not forget that!"

"Well, sir, I hope you will know me the next time you see me," said Kenward Dicks.

"I will," slowly replied Leary, "unless you should keep me from seeing you again."

"I—prevent you? What do you mean, sir?"

"Nothing—only—I was—thinkin—you—might—take a notion—rather than see me again—to jump off the dock!" said Leary, slowly, his gaze still fixed upon Dicks.

Kenward Dicks never changed color, but turned his glance from Leary for the moment.

"Whoever you are, your ignorance is an excuse for your impudence," said Dicks, after a pause.

There was a quivering in the lid of his eye, that, slight as it was, did not escape Leary's notice.

"If I were only certain I'd—but, no—it wouldn't do here, now. I'll wait," said Leary to himself.

"Mr. Garouse will see you, sir," said the servant, appearing at the door.

"Ah, I thought so," and Dicks placed his foot upon the threshold of the door.

As he did so he turned and looked down at Leary, whose gaze was still upon him.

Like a flash, the certain recognition of the man before him came to Leary.

"It is he! I see through his change of appearance. I see it is the murderer of Joe Didier on that terrible night—months ago," he said to himself.

Then to Dicks he said, but in a tone the servant could not hear:

"Shall I save you from the hangman as I once saved you from suicide in order that you might murder Joseph Didier?"

Leary reached out his hand to place it on the man's shoulder.

It only touched the door—closed in his face by Kenward Dicks himself.

"My luck!" said Leary. "But it is he, now I know it. He is the murderer, living in clover, while I—I, the beggarly bill-poster, must post bills through the darkness of night to get my bite of bread and sup of coffee. The wretch! But he's in the toils now, and I'll hound him—haunt him to his doom. He knows Garouse, eh? Strange that I should meet him here, on the very steps of the house where the brothers of the man he has murdered has his home. I wonder if it isn't just as likely that this scoundrel had a hand in making away with Charley Didier, too. That package—ah! he may have known of Garouse's business with the shipping house; he or his pals laid in wait for Charley, and I see it all now—all—all!"

Leary rubbed his hands together gleefully.

"Ha, ha, my good Leary, this is better than bill-posting. This is work that's before me. Now, my fine suicidal bantam we'll see how soon you'll lose your fine feathers. I'll pluck 'em out one by one, even as the life blood of the dying man on that desolate pier ebbed away drop by drop. The wretch! It is he, call himself Kenward Dicks, or whatever else he pleases. He shut the door in my face, eh? He defy me—he laugh at me. He—"

Leary descended the steps.

"I'll wait. I can stand the cold. He won't stay there long. Of that I'm sure."

He crossed the street, and walked rapidly a dozen doors further down the street.

Here he partly concealed himself behind the heavy stone balustrade of a high stoop.

He had not long to wait.

From an opposite direction, Garouse's carriage came rumbling up and halted at the door.

A moment or two after Garouse and Kenward Dicks came down the steps together, and entering the carriage were driven away rapidly.

"Done—this time," exclaimed Leary, angrily looking

after them as they were rolled away from his sight.

"I see—Garouse is going to the police headquarters. That's where I'll go. Certainly that miscreant wouldn't dare go there with him? But why shouldn't he? Who knows of his crime but I? Of course he would. He must be rich, or Garouse and he wouldn't be friends. I'll go there."

And he started for headquarters.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT IN THE SALOON—THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE—A PASTE BUCKET REVEALS A CLUE—FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS.

WHEN Leary reached headquarters, he was again disappointed.

Garouse had been there, and after an interview with the superintendent, returned as he said, homewards.

Alone?

Oh, no. He took with him one of the parties arrested the night before—a "young lad" named Charley Didier.

Was there anyone else with him?

No. Mr. Garouse came in his carriage alone.

"There's my luck again. Sixes and sevens as usual. That suicidal friend of the midnight bludgeon, was left on the way somewhere. Why wasn't I born under a lucky star? I don't believe I was born under any star at all. I don't believe there was any bad luck in the world till I got into it. When I go out of it, the bad luck'll go out with me. I'll wait until six tonight, and—then Garouse—perhaps, I may get something more out of you than the shillings you owe me—rich as you are, sharp and high-toned as you are."

As luck would have it, on his way to his quiet home he entered a saloon to refresh himself with a mug of beer, and to take home with him a paste bucket and brush, which he had left there days before.

There were only two customers at a table conversing. Otherwise the place was deserted save by the landlord, and a great shaggy dog that lay curled up and sleeping with one bloodshot eye half open near the stove.

The two men were conversing in a low tone together over their beer.

Neither one looked particularly respectable or as if they were blessed with a superfluity of money.

Leary having swallowed his beer at the table next to theirs, went to the closet and brought out his paste bucket and brush.

For the moment he sat it down at the end of his table—and asked for another glass.

The two men were evidently disputing; upon the table between them was a small package—a paper parcel.

"You are a liar!" suddenly exclaimed one of them, rising, hot and furious with suddenly aroused rage.

"It was you who—"

"Fool," cried the other, "you don't know what you are saying, I tell you it was not me, Sam. It was Blazer!"

Both men were on their feet.

The landlord ran out to quiet the disturbance.

Leary sat quietly watching the pair.

"It isn't my quarrel," he said to himself.

The one called Sam suddenly caught up his empty beer glass and with the other hand made a grasp at the package.

"You're a liar, I say. It's mine and I'll have it—Blazer or no Blazer!"

The other man at the same time grasped at the package.

As he did so he threw up his hand as if to get hold of the upraised beer glass.

If that was his motive he was too late.

His antagonist brought it down upon his head with terrible force, and in a second his face was streaming with blood.

He staggered back, then recovering himself, though half blinded by the blood that gushed from the gash in his forehead, he rushed at his foe and grappled him by the throat.

As they closed in they turned and were close to the corner of Leary's table.

"Nice party; but they'd better not crowd in on me if they know what's good for their peace of mind," said Leary. "Confound them, they'll get into my bucket next. I'll move it."

The landlord ran to the door to call for a policeman.

As the men turned, and were struggling between the stove and Leary's table, the package fell from the larger man's hand and dropped into the bucket, just as Leary was pulling it away.

Then occurred a strange episode.

The great shaggy dog, which had been winking and blinking through his heated sleep with his blood-shot eye, aroused by the noise of this desperate struggle, arose to his feet and stood glaring at the men.

Then, with never a bark or a growl, he leaped upon the man nearest him and fastened his teeth in his throat, and the weight and force of his spring bore them both to the floor.

The landlord stood trembling and speechless in the doorway.

Leary took up his bucket and went to the door.

"I'll call an officer," he said.

"Oh—oh mein Gott in himmel dish, is awful—das is nicht—bring mit you zwi—tri fere bolice!"

"Yes, yes," and Leary left the combatants, and the landlord.

"I'll stop in to-morrow," he said, as he hurried on; "and see which got the best of it, the dog or the man. This package—ah—well, if it's theirs or anybody else's they'll advertise it. I'll get the reward and return the money like an honest man as I am. That'll be better than staying in there to be bagged by the police."

Once in his garret, he examined the package.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLEY DIDIER—"YOU AND I TOGETHER WILL JOIN HANDS IN HUNTING DOWN THE MURDERER OF MY BROTHER."—THE APPOINTMENT AT TEN.

"HERE'S a boodle," said Leary, as he opened the package.

For in the paper wrapping—lay a pile of crisp bank notes.

"Phew! What a bonanza!"

He counted them.

"One—two—three—" and one after another he counted up to five thousand dollars.

"Ten five hundred dollar bills—I don't wonder those fellows fought for it. If it hadn't been for my bucket the landlord'd have gathered it in, or the police."

A knock at his door.

Hastily gathering up the bills and thrusting them into his pocket, he cried out:

"Come in."

It was Charley Didier.

"Ah, my boy, you're safe; I'm glad of it," Leary nearly shook his hands off. "Now tell me all about it—where you were and what happened."

Charley sat down by the old table and told him all, and then added, "Here is the money—your pay which Mr. Garouse has sent you, to save you the trouble of calling for it at six."

"Trouble? sixes and sevens again. Just when I wanted the trouble of going there, he stops me off by sending it. My boy, do you know if he has a friend a frequent visitor by the name of Kenward Dicks?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the man's history—that is, his business—his ways of living?"

"Only what I've heard Mr. Garouse say, and that is that he came here from another city, that he drew a big prize in the lottery sometime ago and seems to be a very nice man. He has taken quite a notion to me."

"To you? Oh, ho, that's the way the cat jumps, is it?"

"Did you see him to-day—this man?"

"No."

"Where does he live?"

"Live?"

"Yes, live; where does he live?"

"In one of those big stylish houses in east Thirty-fourth Street near Fifth Avenue."

"Umph! He won't live there long if I can help it," muttered Leary.

"So, so. The river pirates came near sending you after your brother, eh?"

"The black-jack saved me."

"Yes—with your pluck. Now, my boy, answer me one question, and then leave me to myself. I have work to do."

"What is the question?"

"Do you have any thought that I had anything to do with the murder of your brother, more than what I have told you? Speak it out if you have."

Charley hesitated.

Then he looked up and held out his hand.

"I had. I haven't now. I will never have again. You and I, together, will join hands in hunting down to his death the murderer of my brother."

Leary took the extended hand.

"Right! We will hunt him down. Not only that, but what he has robbed others of shall be restored to them."

Charley looked up surprised.

"Yes; I have said it. I mean it. Now, go. Come to me to-morrow morning at ten."

"At ten?"

"Yes, at ten. Ask no questions but come. I may want you. I have some bills to post to-night, and in the morning I will sleep late."

Charley went out.

Leary was alone again, and once more he examined the package of bank bills.

CHAPTER X.

"FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD!"—NANCE GRIP, THE HAG, REVEALS A SECRET—"I AM ABOUT TO DO YOU A GOOD TURN, KENWARD DICKS, AM I NOT?"

IN the morning, as Leary sat at his breakfast, he read the *Herald* "Lost and Found" advertisements.

He gave a sudden start and upset his tin cup of coffee.

There it was sure enough.

"Five hundred dollars reward."

The advertisement described the bills, and singularly enough even gave their numbers.

"The above reward will be paid and no questions asked. Mrs. Nancy Grip, No. — Delancy St."

"Grip. Nice name that. So, so. Five hundred dollars, eh? It is now eight o'clock. At ten I can be back here, and meet Charley. I think this lost money may by some strange means lead to something beside the reward. I'll try an experiment."

Hastily throwing on his coat and locking the door, he started for Delancy Street.

He easily found the number.

"The old hag lives in the rear, sir."

"Old hag—that sounds good. Old hags don't usually have five thousand dollars lying about loose enough to be lost."

"What floor?"

"On the first flure sur—in the rare, yese 'll find the old faymale—bad cess to her."

Leary went across the narrow court-yard and entered the narrow dark foul smelling narrow passageway.

He made his way to the last door and knocked.

"Come in," rasped a voice within.

Leary entered. The room was dimly lighted by couple of grimy windows, ornamented by a couple of torn and patched old window shades. The floor was carpeted with the dirt of weeks of neglect. An open grate, from which the upper bars were broken away,

held the only cheerfulness in the room—a bright coal fire.

The room was as hot as the stern of a steamboat kitchen.

Near one of the windows stood a weird old woman stooping with age, and clad in a faded calico wrapper that seemed like a mass of rags.

Thin, sharp-faced, and with sunken eyes and short, tangled gray hair, she seemed a witch.

"You are Nancy Grip?" said Leary.

"Oh, she said, in a rasping, cracked voice. "You have come to—to—"

"Do you a favor."

"Ha, then it's the money, the dear, good money—you have found it, eh? Give it to me; it is mine."

Her gray eyes gleamed out like a serpent's.

"Stop a moment."

"Eh, you have it all in notes?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how glad I am. Let me see them."

He took them out of the package.

"Yes, yes, all mine. Hand them to me."

"Don't you be in a hurry."

"I—I earned them all. I—but I see you want the reward."

"Which I hope to get."

"Certainly—yes."

And she twisted her long, bony fingers out toward the notes.

"First answer me. I want to know how a poverty-stricken old woman like you got this money!"

"Yes—but—oh—oh, give me them,"

"I won't give them up till you answer me, so have them or let it alone."

"I say I earned them—they're my savings."

"Did you lose these notes?"

"Yes, yes."

"You lost them? I know better."

"Well, well, one of my dear boys did."

"Oh ho! Well, where did he get so much money?"

"That's his business," cried the old woman, fiercely, "Give me the money."

"You won't, well we'll see," said Leary, crossing to the grate. "You won't?"

"No!"

Leary deliberately threw one of the five hundred dollar notes into the fire. It shrivelled to ashes in a moment.

The woman uttered a cry of wrath.

"Will you answer?"

The woman glanced at him like a tigress. Her long fingers clutched nervously.

Leary coolly threw another note into the fire.

"Madman, that is money—good money. Help! Fire! Thieves!"

"Stop! Open that door, or utter another cry of alarm and I'll burn the whole package."

"Will you answer?" said Leary taking out a third note.

"What is it to you how he got them?"

"That's my affair!"

"Oh, I see, you want to get money in the same way, eh?"

"Perhaps. Come out with your secret!" said Leary, "or in they go—to ashes."

"Will you divide with me what you get in the same way?"

"Ye-es," drawled Leary, "and you'll give me the notes."

"Yes, I say."

"Then I will tell you. Give me the notes."

"No. The secret first. Answer my question. How did your son come by these notes?"

"From—from," here the old hag crept up closer to Leary, and half-whispered, "from—from Mr. Kenward —"

"Kenward who?"

"Kenward Dicks!"

Leary uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"What was your son to do for this large sum—eh?"

"Sh! these very walls have ears—my son was to help get a young lad out of the way; you understand?"

"I—yes I do," said Leary, "to murder a young lad. Precisely. Now his name?"

"You won't peach, and you'll divide—what you can make out of this man?"

"Tell me the name of the boy that your son is to kill?" hissed Leary.

"His name is Charles Didier."

"The wretch!"

"What does he wish him killed for?"

"How should I know? How should my son know? Now, give me the money."

"Where is your son?"

"I haven't seen —"

"Don't lie or —"

"Well, then, if you must know, an hour since."

"Where does he see this Kenward Dicks?"

"I can find out for you. It'll bring no harm to my dear, good, hardworking boy, eh?"

"No, it'll bring him good. I will be here two days from this, at this hour. Have him here. If you fail, I'll have you all arrested. Remember. Take your money."

The old hag clutched the package and kissed and fondled it.

"Remember," said Leary, stepping toward the door. "You know your doom if you betray me."

At that instant it opened. Upon the threshold stood Kenward Dicks.

"You here!" said Kenward, savagely.

"I am visible to the naked eye, and I am about to do you a good turn, am I not, Nancy Grip?"

"Yes—yes. He's one of us," crooned the old hag, grinning.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BILL-POSTER'S VISION OF THE DEAD AND THE LIVING—A DREAM OF PROPHECY—THE MYSTERY OF JACK BRANDON AND KENWARD DICKS.

"THAT is my man. I only saw him that night by the light of my lantern—but I'll not forget it. This man, Kenward Dicks and the would-be suicide of three months ago—it's a pity he had not killed himself—are the same—curse him!" said Leary, as he emerged from the narrow passage-way of Nancy Grip's abode to the street.

"What a look he gave me! If that look had been a knife, there'd have been one bill-poster less in New York, and one more murder to bother the police."

Leary hurried back to his garret.

It will be remembered that he was to meet Charley Didier at ten.

It was within twenty minutes of that time already.

"I've got the pocket-book of this ruffian's victim—through that I think I will find my way to a certainty of crushing the murderer. As for Charley, the brother—poor fellow—well—if his death is worth five thousand dollars to Kenward Dicks, I'll make it worth double that pile before I'm through with the wretches."

He reached his quarters.

Charley had not yet arrived.

He unlocked the door and went in.

Although it was morning, and the light came in quite brightly through the little dingy window of the garret, and the fire gave a pleasant warmth to the air, Leary shuddered as he entered.

A sort of nameless dread came upon him.

It was a feeling as if he had come into a room in which a dead person had been lying.

"This is queer; what can it mean? If I'd been drinkin'—but I haven't—not a drop—ugh! There's a chill on me like the chill that comes from the touch of death. There's a numbness, too—what is it? I—I—it can't be that I'm going to die—no—no—not yet—not yet."

He threw off his old outside coat, then put it on again.

"There's a good warm fire in the stove, but I'm as cold and shiverin' as—ugh!"

He sat down as closely to the stove as he could.

Even then the heat seemed to have no effect.

A sudden dimness of sight came upon him, and then the chilly feeling passed off and in its place there came a vague dreamy sensation.

He tried to shake it off.

He attempted to arise from his seat.

He did for the moment get up but dropped again.

Then with a supreme effort, by bracing himself with his hands upon the back of the chair, he regained his feet and staggered rather than walked to his bed.

Once upon this his sight grew more vague, the weakness of limb increased, and with no power to struggle against it, his eyes closed and he lay there as motionless and inert, to all appearances, as a figure of wood.

But despite this apparent insensibility there came a vision, as if some great cloud had rolled away and opened to him the reality of a new life.

He saw himself in this vision, saw himself as plainly as in a mirror, standing in an open street.

People, strange to him, were passing and repassing.

As he stood here looking, he saw coming from a covered passage-way in the opposite side of the street the form of Nancy Grip, clad in silk and her haggard witch face rouged and painted like the weird and grotesque disguise of a masquerader.

Beside her came Kenward Dicks.

As they came out, smiling at each other and apparently as familiar as mother and son, there appeared behind them two other persons.

One resembled in dress and manner a seacaptain, and the other was Garouse, the banker.

These two arm in arm.

Other shadowy figures seemed to follow them but their features were indistinct.

But, strangest of all, he, Leary, seemed to be following these phantoms of his vision.

He saw himself creeping out of this covered passage-way behind them.

From an opposite direction advancing slowly, to his horror, there seemed to grow out from among the people passing and repassing the form of the murdered Joe Didier.

There was upon his face the same look of agony; the blood welling out upon his brow from the ghastly wound made by the murderer's club.

As he came nearer Leary saw the image of himself crouching in the shadow of the buildings, and beheld the form of Joe Didier approach within arm's length of that of Kenward Dicks.

The two were face to face.

They seemed not to recognize each other, but they stared, one at the other, the face of neither at first changing in expression.

Then, for the first time in all this vision, the watching Leary heard the sound of a human voice.

It was the voice of the ghastly, blood-smeared Joe Didier.

It uttered only a name.

"John Brandon."

"John Brandon," repeated Leary, and he was about to spring from his place of concealment.

"John Brandon, do you know the hag beside you?"

The woman, Nancy Grip, drew up closer to the image of Kenward Dicks, as if for protection.

The arm of Joe Didier slowly raised, and, extending his finger, he pointed first at the woman and then at the man.

"That woman is the mother of one of your victims, John Brandon. Now look behind you."

The image of Kenward Dicks turned in obedience to the command.

Leary, looking on, uttered a cry of terror.

For there behind Kenward Dicks stood another Ken

ward Dicks, but in a different dress.

This one was clad in a shabby suit, and was woe-begone and wretched.

In his hand he held a club and from the end of it drops of blood slowly dripped to the pavement, making a little pool at his feet.

The face of Joe Didier turned toward Leary.

"Which is my murderer—John Brandon or Kenward Dicks?"

The image of Dicks uttered a cry of despair as it held the counterpart of itself in the form of John Brandon.

"Which?" repeated the pale lips of Joe Didier.

"Mercy!" cried the image of Kenward Dicks, ing and seeming to shrink back.

"The mercy you gave two, shall be yours, Kenward Dicks."

Then suddenly the image of John Brandon raised the club and struck the image of Kenward Dicks a terrible blow.

Dicks dropped as if dead.

Then a strange scene occurred.

The woman, Nancy Grip, stooping down, caught the prostrate form of Dicks in her talon-like fingers and began dragging it away.

There was a fiendish smile upon her painted face, as seemingly with scarcely an effort she did this.

"One is buried in an unmarked grave and the other—ha—ha—where shall this one be hidden?"

As she uttered these words Leary glanced at John Brandon.

The blood-stained club was gone.

John Brandon stood there—yet it was not John Brandon the murderer—for the shape was that of Kenward Dicks.

The one had changed to the other.

Then Leary heard the tolling of the bell.

At each stroke of the bell one of the figures in this vision disappeared—vanished into the air.

As he came out from the shadow of the buildings the street was suddenly darkened.

The street lamps, one by one, at each stroke of the bell, began to flicker and glimmer through the darkness.

Then he saw himself standing on the end of the pier and looking out upon the black water of the river. Three forms seemed to rise up from the water—the three locked in a deadly embrace, and struggling together.

One was the image of Kenward Dicks.

The other Joe Didier.

The third John Brandon.

A sudden flash of light from some unseen source revealed the group.

Only a moment were they visible. Then darkness came again.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AWAKENING FROM THE TRANCE—TRACING A CRIME—"GOOD, THAT COUNTS ONE"—THE BLOOD-RED HAND.

"COME, get up!"

Leary slowly raised himself upon his elbow and looked up in a dazed sort of way.

"Eh? Why—you—what does this mean?"

"Mean? It means that you've been lying here like a log, and that I've been trying to awaken you for the last half hour!"

"Wake me? Was I asleep?—or—yes—I —"

Leary stopped in his speech.

He began to remember the strange feeling which had taken possession of him.

"What time is it?"

"Half past ten."

"And I have been lying here, in broad daylight—asleep—dreaming such strange dreams, and —"

"I waiting here for you," said Charley Didier.

Leary slowly arose to his feet.

Something of the numbness remained.

"Ugh!" he said. "I thought when I lay down there, that my time had come."

He went to a tin basin that was upon a shelf in the corner of the garret, and doused his face with water.

"Ah, that is better. Now I'm Leary again, my boy, I begin to know myself. But I had the oddest of dreams. It wasn't natural. I don't think I'll forget it soon. Sit down there."

They sat down near the fire.

"My boy, do you know you're hunted?"

"Hunted?"

"Yes; that there has been a price set upon your life?"

"Know it? a price set upon my life—what do you mean?"

"Oh I'm not dreaming now. I mean what I say. There is danger in your path, my boy."

Charley laughed.

"Why, who wants to harm me?"

"Who wanted to harm your poor brother—yet he was murdered—almost in my sight. And I tell you, that the same hand that struck down your brother is now waiting to strike you down as cruelly and as secretly."

Didier shuddered.

"Strike me down—what for?"

"Because, you are the brother of the murdered Joe Didier. There is a strange mystery in it that I intend to find out. Listen. I know—I have discovered beyond a doubt in my mind that the man who killed and robbed your brother is in the city."

"You know him!"

"I know him?"

"Then why not arrest him and let him end his wretched life upon the gallows?"

"Wait. Haste often loses the race. This man is crafty, and were I to denounce him now would escape punishment. We must be sure that no loop-hole is left for escape. Now answer me, is Garouse, the man

whom you saw, an intimate friend of this—of this Kenward Dicks?"

"How can I know that. He comes to Garouse's house—they have dealings there together sometimes—that is all I know."

"You remember the night Garouse sent you on that errand to the shipping office—the night you were waylaid by the river thieves?"

"Yes."

"Was Kenward Dicks at the house that day?"

"Yes, he was."

"Good—that counts one."

"Yes; we'll call it a link—link number one. Was he

when you were sent on that errand?"

"No, but he was there just before."

"How long before?"

"It might have been half an hour."

"Did Garouse call you into the room while you were there?"

"Yes."

"And spoke to you of your errand?"

"Yes, I am sure he did."

"Now, tell me as nearly as you can what happened after you left the house?"

Charley told him the story of his capture.

"Exactly," said Leary, when Charley had finished; "and you are sure you were not followed from the house by anyone?"

"Why should anyone follow me from there?"

"There was a man standing at the threshold of the door as you came out?"

"Yes."

"He was not there when you went in?"

"I didn't see him."

"That's enough. My man was at the bottom of that."

"Your man?"

"Yes—the same villain that killed your brother was the cause of your being gagged and thrown into that boat, and he will not rest until he accomplishes his purpose of getting you out of the way or is himself caught in the toils."

Charley Didier might well stare in amazement at Leary when he heard this.

But as yet he did not understand it.

"You do not mean that Garouse is the one that—"

"No," cried Leary, grasping Charley by the wrist—"no, but he is the instrument, the tool in the hands of a master-workman who is the one. Do you understand me now?"

"Don't be so fierce, you frighten me. I know what you have said but I don't see."

"Don't see!" interrupted Leary. "Did I only mention one name and that one Garouse's?"

"Yes, yes, Kenward Dicks."

"He is the master workman in this job."

"Dicks—he—no, no, Leary—you are mistaken."

"No more mistaken than I am when I say that I know the man who killed your brother and robbed him; and who out of the proceeds of that robbery has made himself wealthy."

"I do not believe he is the man who would commit a murder."

"Did I say he was. Did I mention him as being the man?"

"No, but you seemed to mean him."

"I simply say he is the master workman who put up that job of having you kidnapped."

Charley made no reply.

He was more bewildered than ever. Again, too, came into his mind the suspicion that after all this bill-poster, honest and fair as he seemed, might only be deceiving him, and that he was in some way implicated in his brother's murder.

"He wants me to believe that Garouse had a hand in my kidnapping, and that Kenward Dicks is a villain," thought Charley.

But he had sense enough, in the way of shrewdness, not to hint, in any manner of word or action, at his suspicions.

He had told Leary that he no longer suspected him.

"I'll watch him—it won't do an harm. I'll watch him, and take good care to forget nothing he says. If my suspicions wrong him, I'll find it out myself. If it does not, he'll know it to his sorrow."

While he remained silent and thoughtful, Leary had arisen from his seat, and was busying himself about the room.

"My boy," he said, "I am going to pay a visit to this Kenward Dicks."

"You!"

"Certainly; why not?"

"For what purpose?"

"Oh, just for curiosity. There's nothing like being on visiting terms, you know, specially with men who have plenty of money. He may have some bill-posting, you know."

Leary smiled grimly as he said this.

"Bill-posting?"

"Of course, or I may get some other work from him. Once I get face to face with him, I will read him from his topmost hair to the soles of his feet. I'll call upon him to-day."

"Let me know the result."

"Oh, yes—perhaps," said Leary, carelessly. Then, suddenly turning and taking Charley's hand, he said in a low tone: "My boy, if I didn't like you, I wouldn't trouble myself about you or your welfare. Your brother's terrible fate brought us together. Now, do as I say, and one of these days you will bless the day, even though you regret the cause that brought you to me. Go, now, and leave me. To-morrow I will be here. Come to me then, but beware of being out at night. I tell you you are watched, and your every motion dogged by an unrelenting enemy."

"Garouse?"

"Bah! no. You shall know when it is time."

"Kenward Dicks?"

"Ask no further—but it won't do you any harm to keep away from Dicks. That's all—good-bye. Don't forget to-morrow."

"I—I won't. You are going to the house of Dicks?"

"To be sure I am—bucket, brush and all."

Charley laughed in spite of himself.

"And I'll stick a gutter snipe in his back if he tries any nonsense with me. Then, good-bye."

Leary held out his hand.

The hand was almost blood red.

Charley started back when he saw its strange color.

"What's the matter?" said Leary.

"Your hand; it is the color of blood."

"Oh, that is nothing. Did you not notice it before?"

"No," Charley shuddered.

It was Leary's right hand, too; the hand that might have struck down his brother.

"Won't you take it?"

Reluctantly Charley placed his within the other's hand.

"That red is from a stain. It will never come out."

"It looks so like blood."

"Yes—my boy—like many other things—it is deceiving. It looks like what it is not. Once more, good-bye."

So they parted.

But all that day Charley could not forget the color of the bill-poster's hand.

It was a trifle, to think of—but trifles to the suspicions become like haunting specters that will not be banished.

Red Leary resolved to go to the house of Kenward Dicks that day.

In his mind there lingered the remembrance of the strange vision through which like a spirit he had witnessed such weird scenes.

"Is it possible," he said to himself on his way to Dicks, "that John Brandon not only killed Joe Didier, but murdered a man named Dicks and assumed that name and the dead man's place in life? That was my dream—well, well I can't account for it now. When the story is ended, and the play is over I'll know."

After a while he came to the house of Kenward Dicks.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE OF KENWARD DICKS—NANCY GRIP COMES OUT OF THE BASEMENT—THE PUZZLE IN CYPHER—THE DRUGGED BRANDY—THE TABLES TURNED; "DRINK IT YOU VILLAIN, TO THE LAST DROP."

As he ascended the broad stone steps and placed his hand upon the silver bell knob he heard the iron gate of the basement beneath clang in closing.

He looked over the balustrade of the stoop.

A woman was coming out.

It needed no second glance to tell him who she was.

"Nancy Grip—the infernal old hag!" he said. "So, so, she is one of his visitors."

"This morning he visited her; in the afternoon she visited him. Good. It looked business like—sociable too. Nancy is so handsome too—quite an ornament to genteel society—the she-devil, that she is. I wonder what new scheme she is concocting?"

Nancy came out upon the pavement.

Then she looked up and saw Leary.

Her deep set eyes fairly snapped.

"He here. What can it mean? Was he in earnest or—"

"Hallo, my fine friend, lost any more five hundred dollar notes?" said Leary, his hand still on the bell knob.

"What's that to you, meddler?"

"Or have you been undermining me with this good friend of ours who lives in this fine house?"

"Fool. It was your turn when you burnt that money; it will be my turn before long," she hissed as she gathered her shawl about her bent form.

"Don't get mad, old woman, with a man you don't know. A word with you," Leary as he said this came down the steps. "It is this. Don't you try any of your tricks on that boy."

"You're an idiot. You frighten no one."

"If you do, if harm comes to him, I'll tear you limb from limb as a starving man would tear a half roasted chicken into shreds. Ugh, I could do it now," said Leary fiercely.

"You go your way; I'll go mine. Nancy Grip'll not forget you."

"Nor will Red Leary forget you, my charmer."

The woman gave her shawl a savage twitch and bestowing upon Leary a glance of venomous hate, started up the street.

"Ha, what's that—a bit of paper—I'll see."

From beneath Nancy's shawl as she drew it up so closely, a folded paper dropped, unperceived by her to the pavement.

Leary took it up and re-ascended the steps.

Then he examined it.

It was little more than a scrap partly folded and partly crumpled.

He opened it. There was writing in pencil on it.

"Here is a puzzle."

It was written in cypher.

Thus it read.

"7AH2 FI2 W46472 FV FI3 924Y2Y. 4ZC UV Y92 ZFA. VUZ."

B. 9

UV. EB. BVZZ. 6VYU2Y.

"It's a sure thing that this wasn't intended for Nancy to read—nor me either. There's more devilry in this—certain."

Leary turned it upside down and endwise—in vain. Then he thrust it carefully away in his pocket.

"I'll put that on my list as link Number Two!"

He rang the bell.

Presently the door was opened by a servant.

"What do you want?"

"Not you, but your master!"

"I have no master."

"You ought to have them to teach you manners—don't attempt to shut the door in my face. Don't you see, that my foot is in the way."

"We have nothing for tramps."

"Tell your master, Mister Kenward Dicks, I want to see him."

"Gentlemen have cards, and—"

"Clubs are trumps with some of them."

"What's your name?"

"Tell your master that Mr. Leary wishes to see him."

"Who?"

"Mr. Leary—Count de Poste—wearing the decoration of the brush and bucket."

"Wait."

"I will—you can depend upon that, and with this door open, too."

The servant returned.

"You can come in."

"I know I can, and will."

Leary followed him into the reception-room.

"Mr. Dicks will be here in a moment;" and the servant was gone.

"What luxury—what riches! All this profusion for one man only, and that man—well, we'll see."

The door opened and Kenward Dicks in dressing gown, smoking cap and slippers confronted him.

Aside from a slight paleness his face was as cold and expressionless as a face of wax.

"Mr. Dicks?"

"That is my name. You want to see me?"

"To have a little talk with you," said Leary, seating himself. "That face is the face I saw on the pier; the face I saw of the man named Brandon I saw in my strange dream!" Leary added, in his mind.

"What do you want?"

"To take a seat—you see I have it."

"In the first place, who are you?"

"The servant told you my name?"

"Yes."

"And you ask who I am, eh?"

"I do."

"You met me on the steps of Garouse's house—days ago?"

"Ye—yes."

"And this morning early we met on threshold of the door of the honest Nancy Grip's luxurious house?"

"Well, what of that? What is your business with me? I have no time to spare."

"Nor I breath to waste. I want to ask you a few questions concerning young Charles Didier," said Leary.

"Didier," repeated Dicks, in a cold, hard tone.

"Well, what of him?"

"Don't pretend ignorance, Kenward Dicks," said Leary.

"Ignorance? You are impertinent!"

"Bill-posters ain't particular where they put their brush. You seem to have an interest in this Charley Didier."

"None whatever."

"Permit me to inform you that you lie!"

"What?" Dicks started back and reached his hand towards the door behind him.

As he did so Leary put out his hand to a bell-knob in the wall which he just then noticed.

"Open that door," said Leary, "and I touch this bell-knob. It will likely bring up the servants."

"And I will order them to put you out."

"But not before I ask them in your presence who you are, and I will answer the question for them."

Dicks smiled.

"I will tell them you are the man by whose means Charles Didier was kidnapped and robbed and barely escaped with his life."

"You are crazy."

"Not so crazy as not to know I am in the presence of a villain."

"Do you dare—"

"I dare anything for the revelation of a great crime and the punishment of the perpetrator."

"Come, this is folly. You want money I suppose."

"Everybody wants that article, but everybody isn't willing to get it either by robbery or murder."

Dicks glanced at Leary for a moment. Then he locked the door and once more stood before Leary defiant.

"What you know about me or my feelings toward Charles Didier will not either harm me or by its exposure do you any good, but—"

"But what?"

Dick hesitated.

"But what? I know. You think I have come here to blackmail you?"

Dicks made no reply. He was evidently resolving upon a plan of action.

He saw that he was on the verge of a trap—the springing of which at any moment might bring exposure and destruction to his schemes.

"Five thousand dollars is a good sum to pay to make way with a boy like Didier?"

"Never mind—I know, you see."

"It is false."

"I haven't accused you yet, I have only insinuated."

"I see—now—let us understand one another," said Dicks, "my good fellow. Wait and I will take some wine."

"Brandy for me," said Leary.

Dicks left the room.

"I see his little game. I'll go him one better or I'm mistaken. If he had not meant mischief he would have rang for the liquor. As it is—he means to drug me. Nice, very."

In a moment Dicks returned, bringing a small tra

with a bottle of brandy, one of Burgundy wine and three glasses.

"There is water on the table," said Dicks.

"All right."

Leary poured out a wine glass full of the brandy.

Dicks, smiling, did the same with his Burgundy.

"There's nothing like brandy, is there, to cheer one up," said Leary, holding up his glass.

"Nothing; drink."

"This looks like good brandy. Don't you never drink it?"

"Not often."

"Suppose you taste this?"

"Why?" said Dicks, glancing sharply at the bill-poster.

"Because," said Leary, suddenly stepping closer to Dicks, "because, you infernal, treacherous, murderous wretch, you hyena in human shape—because I say you must."

Dicks' face paled to the color of ashes.

He saw that the bill-poster had penetrated his design.

"You—you"—he stammered. "Surely I—my dear man what do you mean?"

"I mean," thundered Leary, "I mean that this liquor is drugged, and I mean that you shall drink it now."

"I shall not. You are a ruffian."

"But not a kidnapper or a murderer!"

"What—I. Help—help!"

Before Dicks could utter another cry Leary drew a short club from an inner pocket and raised it over his head.

"One cry more and I'll harm you—as this same club months ago struck down to his death the brother of Charles Didier upon the pier at midnight. Ha, ha, you know—do you, wretch? Now drink that brandy."

"No—no—I cannot."

"Drink it or I strike!"

Dicks saw no escape.

The terrible look of the bill-poster as he stood there with the upraised club and gleaming eye would have awed a fiend.

"Drink it at once."

With a trembling hand and quivering lips, Dicks reached out his hand and grasped the glass.

Not a movement escaped the bill-poster's glance.

The fear-stricken man raised the glass to his quivering lips.

The edge of the glass rattled against his teeth.

Still for the last time he hesitated.

"Drink it, you villain."

Dicks wet his lips with it, then hesitated again.

"Down with it," thundered Leary, "Drain it to the last drop."

Dicks swallowed it, and then sat down in the chair beside him.

"Now," said Leary, "old fellow, I'll steady my nerves with a drop of this Burgundy, and wait until I see how brandy operates on you. Don't be afraid; I'll keep intruders out and stay by you. When you get sleepy you can take a snooze on the lounge."

Kenward Dicks sat there silent and trembling.

All his bravado for the time was gone.

He was for once conquered—baffled.

He had now no chance to counteract the effect of the drugged brandy.

"You will repent this," he at last said.

"Repent what?"

"This—this—why—"

"Then don't talk; it might weaken you. I can wait here. You see, the drug may loosen your tongue."

Here Leary took from his pocket the paper Nancy had dropped on the pavement.

"By the way, my jolly Dicks, here is a bit of paper with a nice little puzzle in pencil written on it. It's very funny. Perhaps you can read it?"

He held it close to Dicks' face.

"Ha! Give me that. Where—oh, I see all now—that woman—Nance has betrayed me."

"Oh, no she hasn't. She dropped it on the pavement when she went out from here, and I picked it up—that's all. I can't read, but I can keep it till I find somebody that can."

"That will never be," said Dicks.

"We'll see. I may make you read it for me."

Dicks' eyes began to have a heavy, dull expression.

"It's working," said Leary. "Brandy does make people sleepy."

Leary had placed the club back in his pocket.

The words uttered in a sneering tone by Leary seemed, for the moment, to have aroused the spirit of Dicks.

With one supreme effort he leaped from his chair, and sprang upon the bill-poster.

CHAPTER XIV.

RED LEARY ENDS THE STRUGGLE WITH KENNARD DICKS—THE DRUGGED GLASS—"I DON'T WANT TO ROB THE HANGMAN OF HIS RIGHTS."

The struggle was brief.

At the best Kennard Dicks was no match for Red Leary, physically.

Now, weakened by the drug he had taken, his chance was only as one in a thousand.

Leary caught him by the wrists, and gave them a terrible inward twist, which brought Kennard on his knees to the floor.

"I could kill you now," exclaimed Leary, "kill you as I would a snake—crush you out of the existence you disgrace—but I don't want to rob the hangman of his rights!"

Leary held him for a moment, and then grasping him around the body, threw him upon the lounge.

"Now, lay there, and remember that when I am good and ready, and am through with using you, I will hand you over to the police."

"Y—o—u—" Kennard tried to speak, but the exertion of the struggle, his last desperate effort to overcome the effects of the drug proved vain.

The dose he had prepared for the bill-poster was a strong one, and he was its victim.

Voiceless, with dulled sense, vacant eyes and nerveless, he lay where Leary had placed him, utterly at the mercy of the man, who above all others, he had least expected to meet, and had the most cause to fear.

"You're a nice one," said Leary, looking at him.

"Worse than a last watering of paste."

Leary stood gazing at him a moment.

Then his glance fell upon the center table and its contents.

The glass which had contained the drugged brandy stood there with the rest.

Upon it, as upon all of them was the monogram of Kennard Dicks.

Leary took it up.

At the bottom was a grayish sediment.

"That's not sugar, unless he dropped a bit in to hide the taste of his drug whatever it was. I know what I'll do with that."

He thrust the glass quickly but carefully into an inside pocket with the mouth upwards.

"I'll look into it when I get home."

Then he turned his attention once more to Dicks.

"There is a mystery about this man beyond the murder on the pier. He wanted to kill himself, and he meant it too. Why? That's the mystery, perhaps. These conundrums are always coming up to bother me. Sometimes I wish I had never wandered down to that infernal pier. But it's all for the best, I s'pose. I wonder if this scoundrel has anything about him that would be of any use?"

He bent over the man, and cautiously began an examination of his pockets.

"Any regular detective would do this; it can't be much harm to go through a chap like this to get evidence. Ha, what's this—a pistol, eh? If the drug hadn't worked the pistol would. Keys, pocketbook. I don't want them. Papers, eh? two letters. So, I'll gun them. I always had a fancy for reading letters. This one, signed Captain Alex. Seaweed—"

There was a ring at the door bell.

Hastily concealing Captain Seaweed's letter in his pocket, he replaced the other where he had found it.

He listened.

"Engaged at present," he heard the servant answer.

"Umph—yes," said Leary glancing at Dick. "I should rather say he is, and likely to be. But I must be getting out of this. Before I go I'll leave him a token."

Taking from his pocket the stump of a wooden pencil and a bit of paper, he wrote.

"You will see me again—when you are in better trim for talking, and when you least expect me."

"LEARY."

"There, that will do."

He folded it and opening Dick's hand, which lay across his breast he placed the paper in it.

"He'll find it—no fear of that."

Leary softly opened the door leading to the hallway.

Silently as he could he pushed back the dead-latch and opened the front door, and closed it behind him. Once more he was on the step and in the open air.

"I'd like to paste a reward for murder poster on the front of his house or slap it over with gutter snipes. Now then, I'll go to my palace on the top floor. There's harder work than bill-posting before me, and something's pushing me on to it—a something I don't understand. Well, it aint in the books for bill-posters to know everything before hand. It'll come soon enough."

When he reached his garret lodgings, he found Charley Didier waiting for him at the door.

CHAPTER XV.

"COUNTRY" GIMBLET THE DETECTIVE ON THE TRAIL—HIS INTERVIEW WITH GAROUSE THE BANKER—THE DIAMONDS AGAIN.

SINCE Charley Didier was so mysteriously waylaid and robbed of the package with which he was intrusted at the shipping office, and after his escape and reappearance, Garouse his employer had not borne the loss in silence.

The river thieves were right in their assertion concerning this package.

It did contain diamonds—unset and worth fifty thousand dollars.

In sending Charles Didier for them, at nightfall, he had no thought of any danger of losing them.

Who would suspect a youth or boy of being the bearer of such a precious store of jewels at that hour?

It was to avoid any suspicion upon the part of any one that hesitated him rather than an older person at that hour.

Garouse had privately summoned to his house one of the most noted detectives at police headquarters.

A common-looking man was this detective—but withal a shrewd one.

He had successfully worked out many a seemingly hopeless case, and had not only gained a reputation but money in his ten years' career upon the force.

On the very day that Leary paid his respects to Kennard Dicks, "Country Gimblet"—otherwise Jack Gimblet, the detective, was in conference with Garouse at the latter's residence.

"No clue yet?" said Garouse.

"None whatever," replied Gimblet, tapping his chin, reflectively.

"And I suppose I must give up all hope of recovering my diamonds, or of finding and punishing the robbers."

"Oh, no, that doesn't follow. Why, I've had a case on hand for three years, and only yesterday got a posi-

tive clue—a mere hint, and to-night—yes, to-night, I'll have my man."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Garouse, impatiently.

"Well, several things—watch and wait, among others."

"But—pshaw—the diamonds will be scattered and sold long before you get even what you call a 'mere hint.'"

"Not likely. Even if they are the robber will not be scattered and sold—unless he's sold to me."

"Umph! By the way, I had another talk with Kennard Dicks this morning."

"And he still sticks to it that this Charley Dicks knows more about it than he chooses to tell?"

"Yes, and further he persists in his opinion, that—^{and} was not captured really by the river thieves, and that—"

"Nonsense—so far as that goes, this Mister Dicks is all wrong. Wasn't one of the thieves captured?"

"Yes, and got away, too, on the way to the police-station."

"No, afterwards; after he was locked up, too," said Gimblet; "he tricked the doorman."

"I can hardly believe this boy—for he is a boy yet in years—could be guilty, yet Dicks is a man who understands human nature."

"But Dicks isn't a detective?"

"No?"

"Does he like the boy otherwise?"

"No, I can't say he does?"

"Why?"

"He never gave any special reason—save that he didn't like the breed."

"That's no reason at all," said the detective.

"Dicks says that if one brother disappeared with his employer's money, why not the other?"

"Yes, why not? Mr. Garouse, this Kennard Dicks may be a smart man, but he'd never make his fortune as a detective. Was he here when you sent this boy to the shipping office on that errand?"

"He was."

"Did he know what the boy went for?"

"Not wholly."

"But he knew that he was to bring back a valuable package?"

"Yes, and now I remember that I told him something concerning these diamonds."

"Why, or what purpose did you leave them at this shipping office?"

"One of the members of that firm who is exceedingly wealthy, knowing I had such jewels, wished to purchase a portion of them and being an old acquaintance, and sure that they were safe with him, I brought them to him myself a few days before in order that he might examine them as to a selection of the size which would best suit his purpose."

"And the boy was sent to get them."

"Yes."

"Did you need them on that particular night?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?" persisted the detective.

"That I might deposit them in bank as collateral against a large loan I desired to make for a special object," answered Garouse impatiently.

Then Mr. Gimblet took him up on another tack.

"How long have you had this boy Charles Didier with you?"

"From a week after his brother's disappearance."

"His murder you mean. How long have you known Mr. Kennard Dicks?"

"Oh—along, very long time."

"Ah! Has he always lived in the city?"

"No, until within the month in which the murder of young Didier occurred, he had been absent from the city a matter of ten years."

"Was he rich ten years ago?"

"Yes, but on his return I did not know him?"

"Changed, I suppose?"

"Yes. His very features seemed to have altered. Yet, there was something in his appearance—his way of dress which I recognized. Yes, I should never have known him had he not himself and with some trouble, too, convinced me of his identity."

"There were others in the city who knew him, that know him now."

"Very few. Kennard kept himself aloof from men—had few associates. He was a strange fish in those days, but now he is everywhere, and making acquaintance with everybody."

Mr. Gimblet listened attentively.

"Do you think this Didier was a party to this diamond robbery?" he said.

"I don't know what to think."

"Well, I know what to think. I think I will call upon Mr. Kennard Dicks at his house to night."

"Pshaw, what good will that do?"

"We'll see. Was there any other outside about the house, or present, when the boy was sent on that errand?"

"No—yes, there was."

"Who?"

"A queer, independent sort of fellow. I hired him for a day or two."

"His name?"

"They call him Red Leary. He is a bill-poster at times."

"Do you know him—his character?"

"Somewhat. I sent Didier for him to his garret."

"Oh, you did, eh?" Mr. Gimblet tapped his chin vigorously.

"I'll interview this Red Leary also. I think I begin to see the glimmer of those diamonds."

"What! You suspect—"

"No, I never allow myself to suspect anybody," interrupted Gimblet. "It's my business to know, and when I know, that settles it."

"You are going?"

"Yes. On Saturday I will see you again. You haven't any bills about you, I s'pose?"

"Oh—for expenses—yes, certainly—here,"—and Garouse handed him a fifty dollar note—"that makes three hundred and fifty—this is a costly business."

"But to get the diamonds back—only think of that, sir!"

"I do, or you wouldn't get the money."

The detective smiled, pocketed the bill and went out.

Mr. Gimblet then and there had made up his mind. "A knowledge of the whereabouts of those diamonds in the keeping of one of three persons—the boy, Red Leary or Kennard Dicks. I can't think it's the boy, one of the others."

Mr. Gimblet had his ideas.

He had worked up many a case to its terrible end of prison or gallows; only one ever foiled him.

That was the murder of Joe Didier on the pier.

Clue after clue of that he had taken up and abandoned, and gave them all up, baffled.

Now came up this diamond case.

The more he thought of it as he went along, the more every way he looked at it, it seemed to point to Leary.

He was in the house at the time the boy was sent on the errand; he left it at about the same time, perhaps a little before. Might he not have been the man standing at the door of the shipping office, disguised in heavy

twitching of the muscles of the face, a restless changing of positions.

Leary sat down beside him and took the boy's hand in his.

It was as hot as fire.

"My boy, what has come over you?"

"I—I am now sure that I am on the track of my brother's murderer."

"You should be glad of that."

"No—not now."

"Well you're a strange sort of grown up lad."

"Never mind what I am. Since I saw you, Leary, I have made a discovery. I am sure now where I was doubtful before."

"Well, stir up your paste and begin work. Tell me what you have discovered."

Didier looked up into the face of Leary.

He drew his hand away, and suddenly sprang to his feet.

His whole demeanor changed.

The moody, sulky expression gave place to one of desperation—of wrath.

"You may as well know it first as last. You are the man."

"The man! What are you driving at?"

"You are the murderer of my brother!"

"You have come here to tell me this?"

"Yes, not to tell you this, but to tell you more."

long. I have thwarted him once in his plot to make way with you. I'll do it again. This letter—bah!"

The boy stamped his foot upon the floor.

"Be patient. Don't upset your paste before you put up your bill. In this letter he tells you that he knows that I was concerned in the murder of your brother, that he has the proof of it and that if you will go with him on Friday at dusk to Joss Corner's, he will furnish you with the proof."

"And it is this little trick that has excited you, eh? Bah! Do you know where Joss Corner's is?"

"No—but I can find it—for am I not to go with him there?"

"But you will never come away from there—with him?"

"Why not, surely?"

"Boy," exclaimed Leary suddenly, and with a fierce earnestness grasping Charley's arm, "that man tried to-day to poison or drug me; I foiled him and made him swallow his drug himself; I left him lying helpless in his own house. See here is the glass with the drugs still in it." He took the glass from his pocket. Charley shivered. The nearer he came to the discovery of his brother's murder, the more the cloud of mystery seemed to thicken and grow darker.

"Joss Corner's is a den of thieves; a resort where cutthroats and villains carouse; lay their plans of



"The boy and my man together!" thought the detective; "that looks suspicious. I know I'm on the right track."

whiskers? He could easily have arrived there before Charley Didier, even if he started a few minutes after him.

On the other side—Kennard Dick was rich, had a reputation to sustain, and besides was an old acquaintance of Garouse's.

"The finger of evidence points to Leary—Red Leary the bill-poster. I know it."

Gimblet having arrived at this conclusion, determined to forthwith work up Red Leary.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLOT FOR PLOT—LEARY UNEARTHS ANOTHER TRAP—JOSS CORNER'S—THE CYPHER NOTE IS SOLVED—THE PLAN—DETECTIVE GIMBLET APPEARS.

"So, Charley, my boy," said Leary, as he opened the door and went in followed by the boy—"you're here before me, eh?"

The boy sat down by the stove and made no answer.

"What's the matter with you?"

"You ought to know," said Charley, moodily.

"Ought to know—well I like that," replied Leary. "I'm not a doctor."

"It's nothing that needs a doctor. I'm tired of this that's praying on my mind!"

"Shake it off then—whatever it is."

"I can't get rid of it. If I could go crazy I—"

"Don't be a fool, my boy," said Leary. "You're too young for that sort of nonsense."

There was a wild look in Didier's eyes and a nervous

"You're mad!"

"Mad! No, I'm not. Do you know who it is that denounced you as my brother's murderer?"

"No, nor do I care," said Leary, calmly.

"I will tell you. I—I—believe I am going mad."

"That is what I thought."

"Read this,"—the boy handed a letter to Leary. "What is written there is the truth."

"Ah! is it? We'll see."

Leary opened the letter.

When he had read it he quietly folded and returned it to the boy.

"I have just left the man who wrote that letter. Are you fool enough to fall into the trap this Kennard Dicks has set for you?"

"That is his writing, I know it."

"Well."

"In it he bids me beware of you, to brand you as the murderer of my brother."

"You have already accused me, my boy. Do you understand the meaning of that letter?"

"I do, equally as well as know that you are playing a double game with me."

"Pshaw. See here. He wrote this last night. To-day not an hour ago I saw him; left him in his own house. Had he waited until now he would not have written that letter. He would have tried another trick."

"Trick? Everything is trick with you."

"A baby could see through this. I have told you, warned you that this Kennard Dicks as he calls himself hates you, for what reason, I shall know before

crime or hide from pursuit of justice and the vengeance of the law."

The boy shuddered.

Then he straightened up.

"I'll not believe it. Dicks does not go with that sort of people nor to such places."

"Don't he? We'll see about that. Now show me that letter again."

Leary took up the letter. Then from his pocket he drew the slip of paper which Nance Grip had dropped in front of Kennard Dicks' house.

He compared the two.

"I thought so," he exclaimed. "Do you see this, Charley Didier? These are both written by the same hand and with the same ink. This is in cypher. Yours is in English: that's all the difference."

Charley looked at the two pieces of paper.

"Darker and darker," he muttered.

"To you, yes; to me lighter and lighter. Sit down there."

Charley quietly obeyed.

Leary sat opposite him, the table between them.

"Now, let us work out this puzzle. I used to worry my brain over the puzzles in the story papers. Now here is something that beats them all."

An hour passed.

Patiently he worked over it.

At last he struck the key.

He leaped from his chair.

"I've got it, I've got it!" he exclaimed. "See, and this is a key to that letter he sent you as well."

Charley began to think Leary himself had gone mad.

"Now, listen, Charley, while I spring the trap."
 "7AH2. F12 W46472 FV F12 924Y2Y42C UV XG2ZFAY-
 UZ. B9. UV EB. That's Kennard Dicks' way of saying
 it. Translated it reads: 'Give the package to the bear-
 er. Ask no questions. Come to me about the prison-
 er. J. B., Number 93, Joss Corner's.'"

Charley started back and uttered a cry of amaze-
 ment.

"Now, then, my boy, can you see his little game?"

"Your letter was written yesterday; this cypher
 was fixed this morning, and given to Nance. As she
 left Kennard Dicks' house she dropped it from beneath
 her shawl. I picked it up. She is his tool. Charley
 Didier, now who is the rascal? D'y'e see?"

"That package?"

"A year's work to a cent. It is the package of dia-
 monds stolen from you," cried Leary.

"Then it was—it is a trap?"

"Of course. Boy, you have courage?"

"Try me."

"Courage to go into Joss Corner's alone?"

"Anywhere—when there is a chance to find—"

"Enough!" interrupted Leary. "You shall go to
 Joss Corner's—but not in those clothes. You must
 disguise yourself."

"Instead of going there, why not have Kennard
 Dicks arrested?"

"No. That would spoil all. You shall go to Cor-
 ner's alone. Get yourself up as a vagrant, dirty and
 ragged as you can. Take this cypher paper with you."

"When?"

"To-night. Even then there is a chance of its being
 too late. Come here to me at nine o'clock. I will
 have the duds ready for you. I have a job of one sheet-
 ers to stick up to-night. When you enter the door of
 Joss Corner's den it will not many minutes before I
 follow you with my paste-bucket, brush and bills. I
 will call for a drink. You needn't fear but what I'll
 keep an eye open for your safety."

"But suppose Dicks himself is there?"

"No danger of that. If he is recovered from the dose
 I made him take he will be waiting for you."

For a moment Charley Didier was silent.

Then he caught up the hand of the bill-poster.

"You'll forgive me, I believe I have been a stupid
 fool."

"There, my boy—none of that. Do you trust me,
 that's all. We'll conquer in the end."

"You still have that pocket book?"

"Yes."

"And one day—"

"You shall have it. It is yours—but—you shall have
 it on the day vengeance overtakes the murderer of your
 brother."

The boy took the cypher paper up from the table.

"This name—the letters J. B. do not stand for Ken-
 nard Dicks!" said Charley doubtfully.

"No. Nor are the initials in cypher. J. B. means
 Kennard Dicks."

"J. B. is not K. D."

"But J. B. stands for Jack Brandon, and Jack Bran-
 don is the real name of Kennard Dicks!"

"Jack Brandon!"

"Yes, and the Lord knows how many more names
 there are behind that."

As he said this there came a knock at the door.

"Come in."

The door was pushed open, and Country Gimblet, the
 detective, stood upon the threshold.

"The boy and my man together!" thought the de-
 tective; "that looks suspicious. I know I'm on the
 right track."

"You are Leary, the bill-sticker?"

"Red Leary—at your service!"

The detective came in and closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTAIN SEAWEED SAILS IN—ONE MILLION OF DOLLARS TO
 JACK BRANDON—"YOU INFERNAL SCOUNDREL, I WAS
 PREPARED FOR THAT DODGE."

KENNARD DICKS lay helpless and unconscious upon
 the lounge, where Leary had left him—under the in-
 fluence of the drug—an hour or more.

He might have lain there until nightfall had he not
 been aroused by one of the servants.

After much shaking the servant succeeded in making
 him conscious.

"Mr. Dicks—Mr. Dicks!" cried the servant, and ad-
 ding to himself, "he's drunk, and I never seen him in
 this way before."

"Wh—what—where am I? I feel as heavy as if I—
 I'd been turned into lead. Help me to my feet."

"Yes—yes—but Mister Dicks there's a gentleman
 waiting for you!"

"For me?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"He wouldn't give it, sir."

"How long has he been waiting?"

"About half an hour this time. He called twice."

"It isn't that man—Leary—the one that was here
 this morning?"

"No, sir. It's a fierce, weather-beaten man with
 grizzly hair. Looks like a sailor."

"In ten minutes show him in."

"Here?"

"Yes. Now go." The servant left the room.

Kennard Dicks' step was weak enough for a moment
 or two, but a glass of Burgundy roused him.

The door was opened.

"This is Mr. Dicks, sir," said the servant.

Kennard Dicks uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Captain Seaweed!"

"You have a good memory," said the captain sternly.
 Dicks motioned the captain to a seat.

"You didn't expect me, did you?"

"You—no. I supposed you were dead—that
 you had gone down with the wreck of the *Harlem*."

"You see I am not dead. You look haggard—your
 conscience I suppose—a little loggy, eh?"

"No, a nervous headache, that is all."

"There is no need of a waste of words between us,"
 said the captain. "Extra ballast of words sinks the
 understanding."

"What can I do for you?"

"I'll tell you. You thought me dead. I am neither
 dead nor am I likely to die so long as there's salt water
 enough to float a raft anywhere. You remember, the
 night that we first met?"

"I—I—do."

"It was the night after the night of that mysterious
 murder on the pier below, the one at which the *Har-
 lem* was lying?"

"Yes—well?"

"I'll refresh your memory still further. It was in
 South Street."

"Yes, yes, I know."

"So do I. On the night after that murder, in a
 saloon frequented by seafaring men, you came in
 flushed with liquor; in fact, you were drunk as a lord.
 You made a show of money. You had a great roll of
 bills in your hand—hundreds of dollars. You insisted
 that you knew me."

"So I did!"

"You called me by name. I did not recognize you.
 You said you were Kennard Dicks. That you had once
 sailed with me as a passenger from London."

"So I had," said Dicks, coolly.

"The Kennard Dicks who came over with me—"

"Was myself."

"So you said, but you had changed wonderfully. I
 could not believe it was you, for the Kennard Dicks I
 remembered was a quiet man—you were noisy and
 boisterous."

"I was drunk."

"I know that."

"What is all this coming to?"

"This. In that saloon at last you became abusive.
 We had a fight. You gave me a cowardly stab with a
 knife which came within an inch of scuttling me. But
 a month in the hospital brought me up all right. You
 fled away. You dropped from your pocket a letter
 which I now hold."

"Well, some friendly letter, I suppose?"

"Umph! not exactly. It was a letter written in a
 wretched scrawling hand upon a dirty sheet of paper,
 and directed to John Brandon."

Dicks' face paled to the color of ashes.

He grasped the back of his chair convulsively.

The captain went on, his eye fixed upon the man be-
 fore him.

"The scrawl was signed Nancy ~~Crump~~."

"It—it—was—I—found that letter," stammered
 Dicks.

"It was dated on that day. It announced to you
 that, 'you must come to her at once, that her 'boys'
 had hounded a man who had just landed from a Bre-
 men steamer—that the man had a big 'boodle' and
 was dying from the effects of the boys' works."

Dicks brightened up.

"Well, this is a nice fairy tale, captain. In what
 does it concern me?"

The captain looked about him to make sure they
 were alone.

Then he stepped up close to Dicks.

There was a look of terrible earnestness in his eye.

Dicks once more drooped. He felt that some new
 danger was about to reveal itself.

"It concerns you more than you desire. On the other
 side of that piece of paper, written in the same wretch-
 ed scrawling hand, were the words—stranger's name
 is Kennard Dicks."

Had a thunderbolt struck the floor at his feet, Dicks
 would not have been more unnerved.

Yet, true to himself, he tried to conceal his feelings.
 But the captain read him—through and through.

He saw that the nail had been driven home.

"Kennard Dicks dying in a den of ruffians, and Ken-
 nard Dicks hearty and drunk stabbing a man he
 claimed as a friend, in a public saloon in South Street,
 on the same night."

Dicks sat staring at the captain, but uttered not a
 word.

"I have come to you, calling yourself Kennard
 Dicks, to ask you where I can find this John Brandon.
 Tell me that, and you and I are quits."

Slowly Dicks recovered himself.

He could have murdered the captain as he stood
 there with as little compunction as he would have
 killed a worm.

"I—tell—you—I—found that letter on—on I don't
 know how else—"

"Silence man! Whether you are Kennard Dicks or
 whether there are or were two of that name I care not.
 John Brandon the one to whom the scrawl is ad-
 dressed, is the man I am in search of!"

"To what end—for what purpose? What good
 to you, to find the—him—now?"

"To see what sort of man he is—first."

"To tell him that his father, from whom he ran
 away in his boyhood, and whom I knew well, died two
 months ago in the City of Mexico, leaving an estate
 and money, in all, amounting to one million of dol-
 lars."

"What—fath—dead—fortune!" gasped the utterly
 confounded Dicks.

Henry Brandon the father of a John Brandon, who,
 as his father learned, became by turns a vagrant, the
 associate of thieves, and who is here in this city now?"

"One million of dollars."

"How do you know this?"

"Because, in the mysteries of fate, while I was lying
 in the hospital, recovering from the stab which you
 gave me, I received the news through his lawyers, and
 notifying me that I was named as one of the executors
 of his will, and instructing me to ascertain the where-
 abouts of his only son and heir, John Brandon. The

wretched scrawl with that name upon it, and the name
 of Kennard Dicks pointed out my course. I come to
 you. Do you know John Brandon?"

"One million of dollars!" Dicks repeated.

Then, bracing up and looking at the captain, he said:
 "That scrawl—that letter—you have it with you, I
 suppose?"

"I have."

"Can I see it?"

"Yes, if I show it to you."

"I should like to see it!"

The captain took out his pocket-book. From it
 drew forth the paper.

Dicks moved his chair nearer the fire grate. The
 was burning up brightly.

He reached out his hand.

"Let me look at it," he said.

The captain gave it to him.

No sooner did Dicks grasp it than, with a quick
 movement, he attempted to fling it into the fire.

In an instant the captain's hand was on his throat,
 while with the other he caught the paper.

"You infernal scoundrel. I was prepared for that
 dodge!" cried the captain.

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS TIME KENNARD DICKS TURNS THE TABLES—CAPTAIN
 SEAWEED LOSES A POINT—"NOW FOR JOHN BRANDON"
 —THE DRUGGED GLASS AGAIN—THE STRANGE VISITOR.

DICKS was again foiled.

And that, too, at the very moment when he imag-
 ined the captain was the least watchful.

"You need not fear that I will strike you," said the
 captain, folding the piece of paper up closely and de-
 positing it in his pocket; "I am not in a quarreling
 mood."

"I only intended," began Kennard Dicks, "to—
 to—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the captain; "I quite agree
 with you. You only intended to get the best of a bad
 bargain, but your intention was a failure. I see I can
 get no information from you as to this John Brandon.
 I shall seek elsewhere. But, however long it may
 take, I will find him, no matter what obstacles there
 may be in my path."

The captain uttered these words as calmly as if the
 man before him were a friend between whom and
 himself there had never been a word of trouble.

Dicks drew back and threw himself upon the lounge.
 He knew too well who John Brandon was and where
 he could be found.

It was evident to Dicks that the captain more than
 suspected his identity.

"You understand me, Kennard Dicks, do you not?"

Dicks made no reply.

"I shall pause not in my search until I have laid
 bare the mystery which hangs like a dark cloud
 around the fate of the man whose name is mentioned
 in this note."

Dicks still remained silent. His hands rested upon
 the back of the lounge.

But for a single moment did he permit his eyes to rest
 upon the face of the captain.

In that moment when their glances met, the expres-
 sion of each revealed to the other that, despite the
 calmness of the captain and the silence of Dicks, hence-
 forth the struggle was to end only in the mastery—the
 triumph of one of the two.

"Now, Kennard Dicks, I leave you—leave you to de-
 cide your course. You know where to find me. I shall
 always know where to find you, for from this time
 forth I shall not lose track of you. Tell me what you
 know of John Brandon, and—"

Dicks suddenly started up. The dogged, surly ex-
 pression was gone and his face suddenly lighted up.

"Stop, captain," he said. "I have thought this
 thing over. I don't see why I should conceal from an
 honest man like you what I know concerning this man
 Brandon."

It was now the captain's turn to be astonished.

This sudden change in Dicks' manner—so unexpected,
 so complete—was another mystery.

"What is he up to now—where is he steering to?"
 the captain said to himself.

"Sit down, captain. I cannot see you undergo the
 trouble of a search for this wild son of a worthy
 father."

The captain sat down, but keeping a wary eye upon
 Dicks.

Dicks' sudden good nature and willingness to aid the
 captain, began to look suspicious.

"Well," said the captain, "proceed."

"Are you sure you would know this John Brandon
 were you to see him?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"This. I know a John Brandon—Jack he is called
 by his associates, a wild, reckless sort of fellow—but
 after all he may not be the Brandon to whom his father
 has through you bequeathed this money."

"I can identify him by certain marks of which I
 have a knowledge. Upon his right arm above the
 wrist is one in India ink."

Dicks made an involuntary motion of his right arm.

"What is that mark?"

"The letters J. B.—a star and a cross."

"Umph—J. B. star-cross. I do not know whether
 my reckless friend Brandon bears such a mark on his
 arm or not. I shall soon know."

"Where is he now?" asked the captain.

"That is hard to tell. I know his haunts—I will
 hunt him up."

"Why did you not exhibit this willingness to aid
 me before?"

Dicks smiled.

The captain eyed Dicks sharply, still suspiciously,
 as he waited for the answer to his question.

"Because," Dicks replied, "because I was afraid
 that—that harm might be intended toward him. He

has been a friend to me in times gone by—wild as he is."

"How came you by that note?—this one which a few minutes since you attempted to destroy?"

"I'll let Brandon himself explain that," said Dicks; "I wished it destroyed only because I—well for the same reason that I at first kept back my knowledge of his whereabouts."

"A knowledge which is not yet mine," said the captain.

"But which will be within three days."

"Within three days?"

"Yes, captain."

"And you will bring me face to face with John Brandon?"

"Yes—with Jack Brandon."

"That will satisfy me. If he prove himself to be the son of my old friend, he shall have the legacy in money—in gold."

"You can satisfy yourself as to his identity."

"Then within three days."

"Precisely."

"Where?"

"Here, if you choose?"

"I prefer some other place," said the captain.

"As you like," said Dicks.

The captain sat for a moment in silence. He was evidently deliberating within himself.

Then taking his hat from the table he bowed, and turned to the door.

On the threshold he paused, his hand resting on the knob of the door.

"Kennard Dicks," he said, "remember that if this John Brandon does not come to me I will come to you."

"He will be there."

"Good day, Kennard Dicks," and the captain was gone.

"Now, Captain Seaweed, you're in the trap," exclaimed Dicks, his eye flashing, "you shall have a Jack Brandon, and I'll have that legacy, despite your sharpness. Now, then Kennard Dicks, it's your business to find a Jack Brandon that'll work the game to the winning point. Oh, ho, my jolly captain, I'll wreck your little craft on rocks that are not laid down in your chart."

Dicks rubbed his hands together gleefully.

Then suddenly his mood changed and a frown came upon his face.

"That cursed bill-poster! He must be got out of the way—he and that boy. While that boy lives; while he is free, the memory of that terrible night—bah! why should I care. I have wealth, position and a name. They are a barrier to everything he or any one can bring against me. If I could but fasten the robbery of Garouse's diamonds upon him. By

"Yes, sir. If that old lady——"

"She will not call."

Dicks passed from the room.

An hour afterwards a man roughly clad, and with a mass of bushy red whiskers about his face, shadowed by a broad-brimmed soft hat, came out of the basement of Kennard Dicks' fine residence.

He glanced hastily up and down the quiet street.

"Right. Now for my kitchen help. It's a lucky thing for a man to lead two distinct lives. Ah, this masquerading is a fine thing if one is not caught at it."

Muttering to himself, the roughly-clad man hurried up the street.

There was one observer he did not see.

A servant was leaning out of an upper window of the house, who saw him come out of the basement.

"There's that strange man again that comes two or three times a week to see Mr. Dicks. He must have a latch-key, for he has never yet rang the bell, and he always comes in late at night and goes straight up to Mr. Dicks' private room."

"He goes and comes like a ghost. Who can he be? Dicks knows if nobody else don't."

And Dicks did know, for the mysterious man who came and went, and never rang the bell, and who seemed to be so secret a friend and visitor of Dicks, was Kennard Dicks himself.



Leary ran to the woman, and bending over her, raised her head from the rough floor as tenderly as possible.

"As you like," said Dicks: "anywhere."

"You wish to be present?"

"Not at all—after you meet John Brandon my interest in the affair ceases of course."

"Perhaps—but it may happen that my interest in your affairs may not cease."

"What have I to do with Jack Brandon's business?"

"That remains to be seen. But as to the place of meeting this Brandon."

"Name it." Dicks arose and crossed to the mantelshelf, and, leaning upon it, awaited the captain's answer.

It came after a pause.

"Let him meet me at the hotel at which I am living."

"So be it," answered Dicks.

"Now I will leave you. Three days hence at my hotel at this self same hour."

"Yes at this hour. At that time you will meet John Brandon. Should I see him to-morrow, you will meet him sooner."

"At this hour?"

"Yes. Now, captain, take a glass of wine?"

"No," replied the captain shortly.

"At least," said Dicks, "you will take my hand at parting."

The captain extended his hand, and Dicks placed his within it.

Dicks' hand was as cold as the hand of a corpse.

It made the captain shudder. He dropped the hand from his.

Jove! I can. The idea: the very thing. His room at Garouse's is on the third floor—the hall bedroom at the rear: I can find it. Ah ha! Kennard Dicks, you are master now!"

Dicks took up a glass and filled it with the sparkling Burgundy. He held it:

"Here's to you, Kennard Dicks; and here's to the coming Jack Brandon."

He drained the glass, and set it down.

"Only three glasses, here. I brought out four when Leary—only three?"

He examined the three, one after the other.

"The drugged glass—the one he made me drain to its very dregs—is gone! Curse it—I—surely!"

For a moment he stood glaring at the table.

"I see—now I comprehend—that bill-poster—he has taken the glass with him! Is he the pet of Satan that he should—bah—of what use is it to him? I may have been mistaken after all, and only brought in three glasses. Yes, yes, to be sure. That dolt of a poster would never have thought of taking the glass with him."

And Dicks rang the bell for a servant.

One appeared instantly.

Dicks looked at him suspiciously.

"Were you listening at the door?"

"No, sir; I never listens."

"How comes it, Alex, that you answer so quickly?"

"I was—was just passing the door when you rang."

"Umph!" answered Dicks. "Well, clear away these glasses, and if I am asked for by any one, say that I cannot be seen until to-morrow at three."

CHAPTER XIX.

LEARY "PLAYS POINTS" ON GIMBLET, THE DETECTIVE—CHARLEY DIDIER COMES IN TIME—THE STEEL HAND-CUFFS—LEARY'S PLOT.

GIMBLET, the detective, glanced from Leary to Charley Didier.

"Come in—come in," said Red Leary. "We're not working up any private business."

"Oh, no, of course. You are Leary, the bill-poster?" said Gimblet.

"I think I am," was the reply.

Charley Didier had seen the detective several times either coming in or going out of the house of Garouse.

While he was not certain of his character or his special business, he half suspected it.

Mr. Gimblet seemed perfectly at his ease.

He drew up a chair and sat down.

"You've got a cozy little lodging-place here," he said, looking around. "But is—Mrs. Leary out?"

"There is no Mrs. Leary," replied the bill-poster.

"Oh—bachelor, eh?"

"I may be."

"And you," said Gimblet, speaking to Charley, "you—let me see—oh, yes—you are with Mr. Garouse. A good man to be with—a good man. Pays you well, I s'pose. Gives you plenty of holidays, and all that sort of thing, no doubt."

Leary, unseen by Gimblet, motioned Charley to make no reply.

Gimblet threw himself back in the chair, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"What did you wish to see me about?" said Leary.

"Umph! Well," said Gimblet, "the fact is—by the way, take a smoke?" he drew one hand from his pocket, and with it a cigar case. "Help yourself—cheap filling—plenty of flavor to the inch—take one."

"A pipe suits me well enough," said Leary, sharply.

"Ah, well."

Gimblet scratched a match upon his boot-sole and lighted his cigar.

Leary looked at him.

"Well, I was speaking to—or rather, I was spoken to of you, Mr. Leary, in reference to—"

"What?"

"This cigar of mine draws hard," said Gimblet; "some cigars do."

"I knew him now—I read him," said Leary, to himself.

It struck him it would be better for Charley Didier to be absent.

He made a signal to the boy, and with a rapid motion of his fingers pointed to the door.

The boy understood him, and a moment after rose from his seat.

"Going, Charley?" said Leary.

"Yes. This gentleman's business may be private, and—"

"Oh, as to that, my boy," said Gimblet, "don't leave on my account."

"I am not leaving on your account," said Charley, taking his hat.

"Come again, Charley," said Leary, going with him to the door.

Then he whispered: "I know this man. He is after no good. I will see you to-morrow."

He closed the door upon Charley and returned to his seat opposite Mr. Gimblet.

"Now, sir," said Leary—"we are alone."

"Yes," said Mr. Gimblet,—"you sent the boy away."

"He went of his own notion."

"I saw you signal to him. It is my business to see everything that happens around me."

"Oh—it is, eh?"

"Precisely."

"So it is mine. Bill-posters learn that as a part of their trade. Now what do you want of me?"

"Only to make a few inquiries!"

"Concerning what?"

"Something that you may know all about—more than you care to tell—or about which you may know nothing."

Leary filled his pipe.

"See here," said Leary, "do you think I am a paste-head?"

Gimblet laughed.

"No," he replied.

"Or a gutter-snipe to be stuck up or tore down at anybody's will?"

Gimblet laughed again.

"Now, then," said Leary, "I know you."

"There are a great many people know me."

"You are a detective."

Gimblet drew a long whiff at his cigar, but said nothing.

"And your name is Gimblet."

"Correct," was the reply.

"Now then, what do you want with me?"

Gimblet suddenly turned upon Leary.

"Suppose I was to say I want you for being concerned in the robbery of that package of diamonds belonging to Garouse, the employer of Charles Didier, the boy who just left here?"

"I should pitch you down stairs."

"Oh, would you?"

"Yes, because you know I had nothing to do with it."

"I know nothing of the sort."

"Then you suspect me," cried Leary, rising.

"I never take the trouble to suspect. I always make it a point to know."

"If you came here to accuse me—"

"Keep cool, Mr. Leary. Be reasonable. One of three persons are guilty of that robbery, or were concerned in it. It was a nice job, put up in first-class style. None of your common duffers did it. It was too high-toned for that. Now there is a heap of credit in doing a job like that, in that way. It's clean. But there's a clew. I think I've got it."

"Who are these three persons?" asked Red Leary.

"That's telling?"

"You think I am one of them?"

Gimblet smiled and took out a fresh cigar.

"Gimblet, don't make a fool of yourself, and don't take it into your head that you have a fool to deal with in me."

"I don't—I won't." Here he took from his pocket a pair of small, highly-polished handcuffs, and held them up.

"Do you see them beauties? They have been upon the wrists of twenty men. Four murderers—the balance, cracksmen, river thieves and forgers, and they're goin' onto the wrists of the man who planned the robbery of them diamonds. Come close to me," said Gimblet.

"Speak out," said Leary—"You'll not be heard by any one but me."

Gimblet placed the shining steel "bracelets" upon the table.

Then he detailed to Leary something of the substance of his conversation with Garouse about the robbery.

Leary listened quietly.

"Now"—said Gimblet winding up his narrative—now see here "Leary—you see all this—your being in the house at the time—you and the boy being thick—just you own up—peach on the rest of the gang and I'll guarantee no harm will come to you and I'll yes I'll give you a fair share of the reward. You might as

well—for it's bound to be blowed—and you might as well be the first to blow."

"So—so,"—said Leary slowly—"It lies between Kennard Dicks—the boy and myself, eh?"

"Precisely."

"And you think I am the most likely of the three to have planned it—using the boy as my tool?"

"I don't think it—I am sure of it."

"And if I peach on the others I go scot free?"

"Yes."

"And you will give me a share of the reward?"

"That's the bargain."

"And you will contrive that I shall not be known in it; will not be arrested, and—"

"Yes, yes," said Gimblet, eagerly.

Leary while asking these questions had been rapidly in his own mind laying a bold plan.

The detective was clever. But it was evident he had made a mistake.

He had begun at the wrong end of the case, as Leary regarded it.

Leary made up his mind that here was his chance to test the strength of his own suspicions of Kennard Dicks' complicity in the robbery.

"You may as well, between us two, make a clean breast of it," said Gimblet. "It isn't often I give a man such a chance as this."

"No," said Leary. "No, it isn't, and it isn't often a man'll take the advantage I will of such an offer. It's mighty fair of you, Gimblet."

"Come, now," said Gimblet, "of course it's natural you don't like to peach, but—"

"Of course," interrupted Leary.

There was silence in the room for a few moments.

But for the sound of the distant voices of the street far below, the falling of a pin upon the floor could have been heard plainly.

Then the silence was suddenly broken by Leary.

He had arranged his story.

"Gimblet."

"Yes."

"I'll trust you. I'll tell all I know."

"Yes, yes."

"The boy is innocent—he knew nothing of it. His story is perfectly true."

"Well, well!"

"The man who planned the whole thing was Kennard Dicks."

"W-h-a-t?" exclaimed the detective.

"Kennard Dicks."

"By — I that's just what I thought."

"And the package of diamonds!"

"I don't know where it is, but I will know in a few days."

The detective gave a long whistle.

"Now, Gimblet, listen to me," said Leary. "Will you do as I tell you?"

"Um! Well, what is it?"

"Go to Kennard Dicks' house to-morrow—see him—boldly arrest him."

"That depends," said Gimblet.

"On what?"

"On circumstances. It's risky. But I'll see him—and—well—yes—I will arrest him."

"To-morrow eve?"

"Yes."

"And before that time I will give you proof enough to satisfy you."

"Oh," said Gimblet, suddenly, "how is it you did not get any of the swag?"

Leary was for the moment taken aback by this question.

It was a part of the business not down in the programme he had made, and was not thought of in the fairy tale which he had given Gimblet and which Gimblet had swallowed so nicely.

"My share?" he repeated.

"Yes. Dicks must have given you a loose diamond or two at the least."

Leary's ready wit came to his aid.

"Oh, yes—you see, Gimblet, the division of the plunder isn't made yet. He is waiting for the hunt to die out first—then he is to sell the stones and share and share alike in greenbacks—d'ye see?"

Gimblet saw it.

For once at least Gimblet had met his match.

"When will I see you to-morrow?"

"Before you go to Kennard Dicks'."

"Yes."

"Here."

"At what hour?"

"At five o'clock."

"All right—and at seven or thereabouts these bracelets will be upon the wrists of Kennard Dicks, or my name's not Gimblet."

Gimblet put the irons in his pocket, and in a few minutes left the room.

Leary sat down and laughed.

"I never felt so jolly in all my life," said he to himself—"I saw his little game and went him two better. That Garouse suspects the boy; he sent Gimblet here to sound me. I rather think Gimblet will feel sick, but not half so sick as Kennard Dicks, over this little trick of mine. This note in cypher—I'll swear that Dicks is at the bottom of the robbery."

"Give the package to the bearer. Ask no questions. Come to me about the prisoner. J. B., 99 Joss Corner's."

"Well, Charley'll take a hand in that to-night. When I said to-morrow I wonder if he understood me?"

The door opened, and Charley Didier came in.

"Understood you?" said he, "of course I did. That's why I've come back."

"Where did you go?"

"No where."

"No where—you did not go away?"

"No. I was out there in the passage all the time."

"Near the door?"

"Near it? Yes; with my ear close to that split in

the panel. I heard every word. When that man came out I ran and hid behind that old coal-box at the end of the passage."

"Good, my boy."

CHAPTER XX.

JOSS CORNER'S—LEARY AT WORK—CHARLEY ENTERS THE DEN—AN INVITATION—THE CRY OF MORTAL AGONY—"WHERE IS THE BOY?"—NANCY GRIP.

At twelve o'clock that night Red Leary, with a batch of single sheet-posters slung at his side, was pursuing his business at a board fence a few doors beyond the notorious den known as Joss Corner's.

Leary was just washing the rough boards of the fence when, from the gloom on the opposite side of the street, a ragged-looking boy slouched across the street and stood staring at him.

"It's me," said the boy.

Leary never looked around, but dropped his brush into his paste-bucket.

"All right, Charley. Now be careful. If anything goes wrong, give a yell. I'll be near enough to hear you. If you don't come out inside half an hour, I'll come for you."

"All right," was the cheery answer. "Now for it."

Charley went on and presently Leary saw him enter the haunt of the worst class of the town.

Leary plastered away at the fence.

Never did it take him longer to post on three single sheet posters than on that special night.

The night was gloomy, and there began to fall a slow, drizzling rain.

"It puts me in mind of that awful night on the pier," thought Leary. "Just the night for murder and villainy. Hark!"

Footsteps were approaching.

He went on with his work, keeping his eye on the entrance to Joss Corner's.

He could hear the sounds of voices—the rough, coarse laughter—the oaths and revelry of the crowd in the bar-room.

"Hello, old paste-slinger!"

Leary looked around. Behind him stood a hard-looking customer.

"Well, what d'ye want?"

"Oh, nothin'. Seems to me that's dry work."

"Dry for them that don't like it," answered Leary.

"I say, old fellow," said the man. "S'pose you ask a chap in."

"In where?"

"Why the boozin' ken there—Joss—good budge in there. What d'ye say, old feller?"

"Never was in there," said Leary. "It's a hard place, I'm told."

"That's nothing to us. We kin git our nip and then git."

"You're a free and easy cove," said Leary. "If you'll wait a minit, I'll go with you."

"What are you doin'?" asked the man.

Leary had thrown his bundle of bills upon the ground beside his bucket and was rapidly divesting himself of his overhauls and working blouse.

"Tain't no use of skinnin' yourself to go in there," said the man. "It won't make the whisky taste any better, ner you won't git any bigger nip, either. Tain't a place for style."

"I never drink with that paste on me," said Leary.

When the overhauls and blouse were off there was a remarkable change in Leary's appearance, although the darkness prevented the man from noticing it.

"Now go ahead," said Leary, throwing down his overhauls besides the bucket. "I'm ready."

"You're a brick," exclaimed the man. "I'll introduce you to some of the boys in there—if there's any of my gang in. Most of 'em's moral young fellows that goes to bed early."

The man led the way, Leary behind him, quickly drew a pair of false whiskers and a low-browed short crop wig from his pocket, and as quickly placed them upon his head and face.

Leary had done this sort of thing before.

"Now, Charley," said Leary to himself, "I will be near you—thanks to this chap."

They reached the door of Joss Corner's.

Just as the man, directly in front of Leary pushed open the door there came a terrible cry—a cry of mortal agony from the interior.

It was the cry of a woman.

The sound of a rush of feet—a volley of oaths followed.

Leary pushed past the man and was within the den. On the floor near the door opposite, leading to an inner apartment lay, her head covered with blood and her hands convulsively clutching at the boards, an old woman.

One glance was sufficient for Leary.

The woman was Nancy Grip.

She had evidently been thrown out of the rear room, after being struck down.

"Mercy—murder—mur—help!" she screamed.

Beside her, Leary and his companion, not a soul was left in that part of the den.

All had retreated into the inner room.

"My God—where is the boy?" cried Leary.

Even the man at the bar had fled.

Leary ran to the woman and bending over her, as tenderly as possible, raised her head from the rough floor.

"Poor soul!" said the man. "It's—hard—there's nobody here to give us our drinks."

"That's a terrible blow she's got," exclaimed Leary, pushing back the matted, unkempt gray hair from out of the blood that covered her brow—"ugly cut it is—the wretches!"

Leary glanced around the room.

It was lighted by a common swinging lamp, depending from the centre of the black and grimy ceiling.

The light struggling dimly through the smoky crack-

ed chimney made the place seem in its dull gloom as if fitted to complete and make more ghastly the scene of a murder.

The short counter—the shelf behind with its row of black bottles, and as a center piece—suspended above the shelf, a dingy lithograph of a prize-fight, and two or three small tables against the wall—all seemed mute, helpless witnesses—dumbly giving in their looks evidence of the vileness of the place.

"Put a couple of those tables end for end," said Leary, "so I can lay the woman on them; it'll be better than the floor."

The tables were pulled out and Leary lifted the woman upon them.

She had partially regained consciousness and was moaning—the white froth mingled with flecks of blood oozing out upon her thin lips.

Turning from her, Leary to his surprise saw a man standing behind the counter.

How he came there was a mystery.

"You're the barkeeper?"

"Maybe I am?" was the man's reply.

"Yes," said Leary's companion, "that's the gin-slinger. How're you, Stabber?"

Stabber looked in keeping with his name.

"You fellows want to drink you'd better git it and skirmish out of here and let the old gal alone. She's used to that sort of thing!"

"She won't be used to it any more, I'm thinking. Why—here you—go and hunt up a doctor," said Leary.

"You couldn't get a pill roller in here—it ain't no good place for 'em. Fire a three finger-dose of gin down her throat—that's the sort of medicine 'll bring her up," said Stabber.

"Heartless wretch," muttered Leary. "Will you go for a doctor?" he said to the man beside him.

The man looked toward the barkeeper.

The barkeeper shook his head.

Leary saw the action.

"Oh, that's it? Now then either you go for a doctor or help of some sort, or I'll go and bring the cops on you—take your choice!"

"You will, will you?" sneered Stabber. "That's your game, eh?"

Nancy Grip threw up her arms and moaned. She began swaying her head from side to side and her long skinny fingers opened and closed convulsively.

Suddenly her half closed eyes opened wide and their gaze was fixed upon Leary.

"See the old gal is coming to," said the barkeeper.

"Mention gin agin and it'll fetch her onto her pins sure."

Leary wiped the blood from her lips.

CHAPTER XXI.

LEARY CAUGHT IN THE TRAP—THE STRUGGLE IN THE BAR-ROOM—WHERE IS CHARLIE DIDIER?

NANCY still kept her eyes fixed upon Leary.

The convulsive movement of her talon-like fingers had partially ceased, and one of her arms had fallen limp and nerveless across her breast.

Presently she began to move her eyes from Leary to the man beside him and toward the bar.

When her glance rested for an instant upon Stabber, the bar-keeper, she closed them suddenly and shuddered, as if the sight of him had conjured up dimly in her mind the memory of something dreadful.

"You let the old gal alone," said the bar-keeper; "she'll come around all right."

"Who struck her down?" asked the bill-poster.

"Dunno—she—she fell out of the other room. Some of her pals pushed her out, maybe. She's awful to manage when she gets aboard an over ballast of benzine," said the bar-keeper.

"Are her pals in the other room?"

"Dunno."

Leary knew the bar-keeper was lying.

Turning to the man who had entered the place with him, Leary once more asked him to go for a doctor.

"You'd better not," said the bar-keeper.

"See here," said Leary sternly, and stepping from the table up to the counter so that he stood face to face with the bar-keeper; "see here, there is a mystery here that I am going to have cleared up. That woman there is dying. You were here when she was struck down. You know who did it. By stepping to that door one cry of mine will bring the police, who know this to be one of the worst dens in the city. Now, either you lend a hand in getting a doctor, or I call for the sort of help you won't like."

"Why don't you go yourself?" said the bar-keeper.

"Because I know that when I get back, you and your pals in the other part of the house will have taken her away, knocked her on the head and so hidden all trace of your crime."

"Come, take a drink and settle down, old fellow," said the man who had come in with Leary.

Leary turned and for the first time caught a full face to face glance at his features.

At the same instant Nancy Grip uttered a terrible groan.

The eyes of the two men met.

Leary uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The face of the man had a strange, familiar look.

Where had he seen it before?

His voice was coarse and gruff. The sound of that he did not recognize.

"The old gal's comin' round," said the bar-keeper, "Come, gen'l'man, what'll it be?"

He placed the glasses upon the counter.

Not in the usual manner, however.

"That's one for you, my boy," he said, as he set one of the glasses upon the counter, with a loud thump, in front of Leary's strange companion.

"That's one for me," said the bar-keeper, placing the second glass in the same manner in front of himself.

Leary was silently bending over the moaning woman now.

He was thinking for the moment what was best to do. "And, my covey," said the bar-keeper, bringing up the third heavy bottomed glass, and speaking to Leary—his voice in a louder key than before "there's one for you."

Then the movement of the bar-keeper in setting out the glasses found an explanation.

"There's one for you," was no sooner uttered, than the man outside the counter sprang to the door by which they had entered, and fastened it by shooting across it a heavy iron bolt.

At the same instant the door leading to the inner room was flung open, and half a dozen men rushed out.

Leary turned and faced them.

In the dim light shed by the solitary lamp overhead he saw who they were.

One of them he remembered as one of the men that had quarreled over the package of money in the beer-saloon.

It was a trap, and these men had been prepared for it by their leader.

The whole movement had been so suddenly executed that it seemed to him like the weird action of a dream.

The men rushed upon him so quickly that there was no chance for an effective resistance.

Yet the first surprise over, Leary, as the men sprang upon him, grappled with the one nearest him.

"Don't hurt him, boys!"

This command was another surprise for Leary.

It was given by the man who had come in with him—the man whose face seemed so strangely familiar.

But instead of the gruff, coarse voice, it had changed to one that Leary recognized at once.

"You—you!" exclaimed the bill-poster as he vainly endeavored to free himself from his assailants.

"Yes—me!" exclaimed the man. "I, Kennard Dicks, up there in the avenue, but here, the proprietor of Joss' Corner and the captain of these good men, from whose clutches you can only escape—dead!"

"Infamous scoundrel!" cried Leary.

"Don't hurt him, boys," said Dicks. "Throw him down, gag him, strap him and drag him into the other room—our little reception room, boys."

In vain Leary tried to draw his pistol, in vain every trick of wrestle, every grip at the throats of the ruffians, every blow from his strong arm—they met at every turn.

Dicks took no share in the struggle.

In his disguise, standing by the bar and near the door leading to the street, he seemed a passive spectator.

The men were doing his work well, and there was no need of his aid.

Leary struggled desperately still.

Three of the strongest of the men were upon him.

They forced him to his knees.

Their whole weight, added to their muscular force was more than he could battle down.

With one last supreme effort Leary half arose beneath their weight and endeavored to break loose from their grasp.

But he might as well have thrown himself against a wall of stone.

They once more hurled themselves upon him.

With terrible desperation inch by inch he fought against the fearful odds.

They forced him back. Suddenly one of the ruffians, the largest and most powerful of the gang, struck him a blow behind the ear, which staggered him from his feet.

He wheeled around and fell backward against the table upon which Nancy Grip lay.

His whole weight came upon them—he made a last wild clutch at one of them to save himself from falling.

Then he dropped helpless, dragging over with him the tables, and with it came the woman—falling in a heap upon the floor—her head striking on the floor.

"Now then, your work is easy," said Dicks, as coolly as if he were merely giving an order for a dinner, "bind him securely, gag him and take him in there. As for the old woman, take the infernal treacherous old hag—two of you can do that—into the street—carry her up to the fence—and leave her there—the police 'll think it's another mysterious murder."

"But she isn't dead yet, cap."

"She will be—if anything short of a hanging match can kill her."

The men very quickly secured Leary beyond all possibility of escape.

They were used to that sort of work.

They bound him hand and foot, and finished by cramming a wad of cloth into his mouth.

"Now, cap, he's as safe as a jack in a box."

"Right, drag him in there."

The men obeyed. Meanwhile two of the ruffians lifted Nancy Grip from the floor.

Dicks pushed back the iron bolt, and in a moment more they were carrying her through the darkness of the street to the place indicated by Dicks.

They laid her down, it so happened, or as perhaps was intended by Dicks, at the very spot where Leary left his paste bucket brush and overhauls, close in by the fence.

The rain was now falling steadily.

Save the two men and the woman they had left lying there like a bundle of rags no human being was visible in the street.

They returned to the bar-room.

It was open again, the tables were replaced, Stabber the bar-keeper was behind the counter and one or two of the gang were in front of it, refreshing themselves with a drink.

But Dicks was no longer visible.

Not a sound was heard from the rear room, and Joss' Corner to all appearances was as orderly and quiet an all night dive as the heart of a policeman could desire.

Beyond this bar-room and into the mysteries of the

corner, the police had rarely ventured in pursuit of fugitives. Even then their search had resulted in finding nothing affording cause for arresting those who seemed to have charge of it.

When they "wanted" a notorious thief or criminal, they came there for him.

If he did not belong to Kennard Dicks' gang, he was at once given up.

If he did, he disappeared, after he had crossed the threshold of the rear room, as completely and securely from all further pursuit, as if he had vanished into air.

Here was, in these surroundings, the other life of Kennard Dicks. Here he ruled, the master whose commands were never disputed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE UNDERGROUND MYSTERIES OF JOSS' CORNER'S—KENNARD DICKS LAYS HIS PLANS.

In the rear room.

A low ceiling, and the features of it in keeping with those of the bar-room.

Here were sitting four or five of the party, at a table.

Upon the table a lamp was placed, and two or three bottles and glasses.

"The cap's got that infernal bill-poster, now, what'll he do with him? That's what I'd like to know. I'm blowed if I can understand him sometimes," said one of the men.

"Who, the bill-poster?"

"No, the captain. Now, why didn't he let us quietly knock him on the head, and end the matter if he wants to get rid of him?"

"Murder, my boy. The cap's a tender-hearted chap, you know."

"Yes, he show'd that when a month ago, he brained Bill Dozer down at the kitchen."

"He had to do that. Wasn't Bill's pistol a drawin' a bead on him?"

"Sh!—hark!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Sh!" repeated the speaker. "There's a strange cove in the bar. I heard him speak."

"Bah! some night-hawk come in for his budge. I say, what's the job for to-night?"

"Nothing—except to booze. It's about time we dropped on a pile of swag. I'm gittin' frightfully poor."

"Cap says he's got a big lay out for us."

"When?"

"Yes, that's the question—when?"

"Sh! here he comes."

The noise of footsteps—the opening of a door at the side of the room, a rush of cold, damp air, and Kennard Dicks entered followed by two of his companions.

"There, boys—that little job's fixed. Now then to another sort of business. You know that yesterday I sent you word of that downeast schooner that lies out in the stream? She's dropped lower down. She'll be there to-morrow and until next day. To-morrow night only one of the hands and the mate's wife will be left aboard. In the captain's locker will be the money he is to receive to-morrow morning for the cargo he discharged. Four of you can do the job. All of you share and share alike—nothing for me."

"Is it worth it, cap?"

"Yes—I was in the shipping office on the pier—I know."

"All right, cap. That's enough for us."

Dicks, looking as little like the Kennard Dicks that Leary had forced to swallow his own drugs in his splendidly-furnished reception-room a few days before, as he did like a minister—seated himself at the table.

His two companions lounged out into the bar-room. For half an hour Dicks sat there not drinking but smoking and arranging with the men the details of their coming midnight raid on the schooner.

That being settled, one by one the men departed—two of them settling themselves in the bar-room at cards, the others going their way out into the night and rain.

When they had gone Dicks called his two companions.

They returned to the room.

"Are they gone?"

"As good as gone," was the reply.

"Where is the rest of the gang?"

"Working, else they'd have been here to-night!"

"On what lay?"

"Old cordage iron and 'longshore pick ups!"

"Now then, Jim you and Bullseye come with me; we'll go where we can talk quietly."

"Tell Stabber to —"

"No; Stabber knows his business."

"All right then."

"Catch hold of that table there."

The two men understood what was wanted.

They lifted the table from the center of the room to within a few feet of the side wall.

When the table was moved the outline of a trap-door was visible.

Stooping down, Dicks, by inserting a short bit of iron shaped like a screw-driver, which he took from his pocket, in the crack at the side of the trap, raised it an inch or two.

Then the two men catching it at the edge, raised and disclosed an opening three feet square.

"It's a black-looking hole, isn't it?"

"Yes; but its darkness is its safety."

Dicks reached his arm under the edge of the opening and brought out a rope.

He pulled away at this, and presently it tightened and the top of a ladder became visible.

This he braced against the side of the opening.

"Now then, Bullseye, you come last and close the trap after you."

Dicks and Jim descended the ladder into the darkness.

The man, Bullseye, followed, closing the trap over his head.

The room above was now deserted.

They descended the ladder and presently stood in the darkness upon the cellar bottom.

The darkness was so intense that neither could see the other.

But these three men were, as well may be imagined, no strangers to the place and its ways, and darkness for their deeds and business was at times a welcome element.

Dicks groped his hand up the rough stone wall of the cellar until it touched a shelf.

From this he took down an ordinary lantern.

The flash of a match and the lamp within the glass sided lantern was lighted.

The darkness was gone.

Then in the light, the surroundings, only from rough stone walls, were visible.

A pile of coal, an old barrel or two, and the fragments of boxes scattered about.

"The cops thought they found a big thing last month—eh, cap, when they lit on that trap and got down here?" cried Jim.

"And found nothing."

"And got up again with their ears pinned back."

Dicks made no reply to the words of his companions.

He went to the back wall of the cellar.

Near the centre he pulled out a small fragment of stone.

In the aperture thus made, he thrust the same piece of iron with which he had raised the trap-door.

He pressed it in hard.

Then a portion of what had seemed solid rough hewn stone swung slowly out.

It was a door to the outer surface of which had been ingeniously fastened bits of stone and plaster, so that when closed it would have required sharp eyes to have detected this deception.

"That door cost me five hundred dollars," said Dicks.

"And its maker his life," said Jim, in an undertone.

"That was because he had a loose tongue," said Dicks.

"Come."

Followed by the men he passed through the opening.

Then he closed the door after him.

They were now in a large cellar, but which seemed more like an above ground apartment.

The walls, save where the door was, were plastered, the ceiling was white and clear, and the floor covered with heavy matting.

There were two arches at one side, similar to those which lead out under the sidewalk of an ordinary house or store.

In this room were a couple of tables, a lounge, a cupboard, and a fireplace.

"Now we can talk."

"Rather. But how about—you know?" and Jim made a motion with his thumb toward one of the arches.

"He won't hear. If we can't hear him I don't think he'll trouble us."

Dicks lighted a cigar, and the precious trio seated themselves at the table.

"Now, Jim, your work is easy. Tied so he can't move a limb, gagged so that he can't move his lips, that boy must be taken from here. It's an easy job."

"How, in broad daylight? why not now?"

"It wouldn't do. Put him into a bag, tie the top up tightly—throw it into a wagon, and then—"

"Then what?"

"Leave the rest to the driver of the wagon."

"Is he one of us?"

"No, but the one to whom he will deliver the sack with its motionless contents, is one of us—as trusty as yourself."

"Isn't it risky, cap?"

"There is risk in everything."

"Once in the keeping of Dousey, and this Didier will never again cross my path."

"Will Dousey—is he to—"

"Kill the boy? Pshaw, there are other ways to get rid of a kid like him than by murder!"

"Exactly," said Bullseye. "You did it neatly, cap, gittin' your grippers on that boy. Lord! didn't I grin to see how neatly Stabber baited him into the back room, and how nicely we fellers lit on him, before he knew whether he stood on his head or his heels."

"With that cypher message in his hand."

"Yes," said Dicks, "you did the job nicely. What a wretched dolt that bill-poster must have thought me. I have him now, and I'll keep him. Under that stone arch let him lie and rot—starve, for aught I care."

"That makes two of them—yes, counting the boy—three of them caged here, right under the nose of the police," said Bullseye.

Bullseye and his fellow Jim soon began to show symptoms of uneasiness.

Bullseye threw up his hands and yawned.

"Sleepy, eh?" said Dicks.

"Sleepy's no name for it."

"Bunk in there on that lounge. And you, Jim, stretch yourself on the floor here; there's a buffalo robe you can roll up in."

"All right, cap," said Jim.

"After you've had a sleep we'll arrange matters."

In a few moments the men were fast asleep.

When Dicks ascertained this he took up the lamp and made his way into one of the two dark archways.

The silence, save the heavy breathing of the two sleepers, was profound.

The archway at the distance of ten or twelve feet terminated with a pair of heavy iron doors.

They were low and narrow, and were far enough apart to be the entrances to separate rooms or cells.

At one of the doors Dicks paused and listened.

"No sound. Ah, these walls are thick—were the dying to howl in their agony, the cry would not be heard beyond those iron doors. Better a prison like this for them, than the Tombs and a gallows for me."

From his pocket he took a key, and placed it in the great rusty lock of the door, at which he was listening.

The bolt was shot back, and with an effort he swung the door back on its hinges.

Holding up the lamp to a level with his shoulder, he peered in.

"Safe," he muttered, "and still unconscious. Good!"

Sure enough.

For there on an old straw mattress, bound and helpless, with only the gag removed from his mouth, lay Leary, the bill-poster.

He was breathing heavily, and apparently in a stupor.

"You would baffle me—me Kennard Dicks would you, with your shallow tricks. You would hunt me down, proclaim me a robber—a murderer, eh?"

For a moment he stood gazing at the prostrate form of this man whom he regarded as his bitterest foe—as the only man in all the great city whom he dreaded.

"Quiet enough now," said Dicks, "quiet enough now."

Upon the ground in this terrible place was a pitcher of water and a plate containing part of a loaf of bread and a piece of meat.

The atmosphere was close and stifling.

Above—in the center of the ceiling was a grating—above that, set in the thickness of the stone, was a small ground glass bullseye, and above that another grating.

This, in the brightest of days, flood it with its light as it might, the sunshine could be of little solace to the prisoner.

The light that penetrated served only to make more hopeless the man, the more dismal and gloomy the narrow cell.

Now in the darkness of the night it was a tomb.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE UNDERGROUND DUNGEONS—LEARY'S RESTING PLACE—DETECTIVE GIMBLET STRIKES A TRAIL—"IF THE BOY DOES HIS WORK STRAIGHT, I'LL GIVE HIM A DOLLAR."

"LIE there—lie there—and instead of hunting me, hunt the rats—instead of counting your bills, count the straws of your pallet—fool that you were. You turned the tables on me once—you won the first trick in the game—where are you now? Shriek, moan, shout yourself hoarse if you like, and listen to the echoes of your voice—ha, ha, my fine bird."

He turned from the cell, closed the door, and locked it. Coming into the room he looked at his watch.

"Three o'clock. This has been a busy night, a night of work, a night of victory. Now then there remains two more things to accomplish, and then I can rest in peace. One is Captain Seaweed—ha, he is another friend of mine. He shall have his Jack Brandon, within twenty-four hours he shall have him."

Dicks sat musing and planning—gloating as his busy brain mapped out his schemes—over his success.

"The boy—ah, Stabber's got him safe enough in the closet—no fear of him."

He glanced down at his companions.

Bullseye was sleeping as soundly as if his mind had never known a thought of crime.

Jim snored.

"How easy it would be for me to brain these two rascals! I may have to do it or give out the job to some of their pals. Dead men tell no tales. Don't they? Ah, that is yet to be proved. Now then, Dicks, an hour's sleep for yourself may do no harm."

From a large locker or chest in one corner of this strange subterranean room he drew out to or three heavy buffalo robes and a tasseled cushion.

These he arranged upon the floor.

"Not so soft as my spring bed in my other house, but it'll answer. After the battle's won the victor can sleep soundly on the hardest of beds."

He stretched himself at full length and was soon like his companions—asleep.

Next day two men drove up in a light wagon opposite the tenement in which was Red Leary's garret lodging.

They leaped out and entering the passageway ascended to the upper floor.

One of them producing a key opened the padlock, and followed by his companion entered the apartment. Everything was as Leary had left it.

"Well, Bullseye, it strikes me that the captain won't make much out of this lot of stuff. An old stove, a rickety table and a bureau, that looks as if it was ready to drop into pieces," said Jim.

"Obey orders if we break owners," replied Bullseye.

"It won't break anybody, not even that bill-poster to lose this lot. What shall we move first?"

"That rattling old box of drawers."

"Then down it goes."

The two men began their work.

Under Dicks' orders they were not to leave a scrap of anything in the place.

"Not even a piece of stick or a shred of cloth, leave nothing," was the command they had received.

They carried down a portion of the contents of the room and placed it in the wagon.

They had returned, and were tying up in one large bundle the bedclothing, when there came an unlooked for interruption.

"Hello, here."

They looked up.

In the doorway stood Gimblet the detective.

To them he was a stranger.

To him, however, they were not unknown.

"Hello, here," he repeated.

"Well—hello it is," gruffly answered Bullseye.

"What's all this mean?"

"Means moving."

"Where's the bill-poster—Leary?"

"He isn't here."

"I don't ask where he isn't. It's where he is and what this moving out means."

"I dunno," said Jim. "He hired us to move his traps, and we're doing it."

"Where 're you going to take them?"

"Oh, just around the next block," said Jim.

"Yes—well," said Gimblet. "Is he there waiting for you?"

"I s'pose he is."

"You s'pose, eh?" said the detective.

He didn't like this movement.

Either it was an attempt on the part of Leary to get beyond his reach or it was not.

The fact that these men, whom he knew to be a couple of rascals, were moving the furniture did not benefit the bill-poster in the opinion of Gimblet by any means.

He watched the men at their work.

They were a long while tying up the bed clothing.

They were evidently not anxious for Gimblet's company.

"Well," said Jim. "Is there anything you want here?"

Gimblet thrust his hands into his pockets.

He made no reply.

"Cos if there's nothing you want it's mighty easy to take nothing and go."

"See here," said Gimblet, quietly—"my men, I'm a special friend of Leary's."

"S'posin' you are—we can't help it?" said Bullseye.

"You can give me the number of the place and the street he is moving to—can't you?"

"Well you see boss," said Jim, pausing in his work and looking up—"Leary's a queer fellow, and likes to be to himself."

"Well?"

"And don't like visitors."

"No?"

"No. So he says to me and my pard, says he—boys, don't let anybody round there know where I'm a movin' to."

"All very fine," said Gimblet.

"Now you see it wouldn't be fair for us, that's he's a payin' to do his work, to do what he don't want us to do—would it?"

Gimblet saw that there was but one way.

That way he adopted at once.

"Well if you don't tell me I'll have to wait till I meet him," said Gimblet.

"Guess you'll wait a long time," muttered Jim.

"What's that?" asked Gimblet.

"Oh, nothin' only sayin' suttin' to me pard here, that's all."

"Oh."

"Are you off?"

"Yes; you can tell Mr. Leary I called, that's all?"

"Be sure we will," said Bullseye, with a grin.

Gimblet left the room.

Once in the street he looked about him.

Half way up the block a group of boys were playing around a great heap of sand.

Gimblet went up to them.

One of them, the eldest, ragged as to dress, dirty as to face and hands, and sharp as to eyes, struck Gimblet as being the sort of boy he wanted.

"Bub."

The boy came down from the sand heap.

"Do you want to earn a quarter?"

"Yes," was the eager reply.

"Do you see that wagon down there?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you can keep that wagon in sight when it is driven off—follow it without letting the driver notice you, and find out where it stops?"

"Yes, if they dosent drive too fast."

"There ain't much fear of that. You can dodge along on the sidewalk behind the wagon, you know."

"But where kin I find you?"

"You'll find me in that doorway where the men are loading up the wagon."

"All right, boss. It's a quarter is it?"

"Sure, and if you do the job right, maybe it'll be a quarter more."

"What, a half a dollar."

"Yes."

"Hoorah!" cried the boy. "Hoorah, fellers, here's a go."

"Now be careful, don't lose sight of the wagon."

"I'll follow 'em chuck into Jersey."

Gimblet laughed.

The boy walked or rather skipped away, delighted with the task.

"Now, Mr. Leary, bill-poster, we'll see whether you can dodge Gimblet so easy. If that boy works his game right, the bill-poster's little cat'll be out of the bag mighty quick."

Gimblet strolled up the street as far as the next corner.

Here he quickly stepped into a doorway.

"Ha!"

The exclamation escaped his lips as his eyes rested upon a man passing on the opposite side of the street. It was Kennard Dicks.

"Where's that swell going I wonder?" said Gimblet to himself. "This isn't the sort of neighborhood for him to promenade in."

Dick walked on.

Gimblet's eager eye was upon him.

When he was nearly opposite the place where the wagon stood he stopped.

Then in a moment he crossed over.

As he did so, Jim and Bullseye came out to the wagon.

"Oh, ho! Perhaps Kennard Dicks and Leary don't understand each other," said Gimblet.

"By Jove, I think I'm getting closer and closer to that package of diamonds. If that boy only does his work straight—dammit I'll give him a dollar!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

RED LEARY WORKS HIS WAY OUT OF THE VAULT INTO ANOTHER.

WHEN, in the gloom and silence of the narrow dungeon into which he had been thrown, Red Leary came slowly back to consciousness, it seemed to him that he had passed through the terrors of a distempered dream.

With consciousness came memory, and bit by bit, piece by piece, like the weaving and putting together of a patch-work quilt, came to his mind the recollection of the past two days.

Then, despite his own terrible condition he thought of Charley Didier. "Poor boy. It was all my fault. I sent him into the trap of this accursed fiend, and heaven alone knows his fate. Oh, Kennard Dicks, once that I am free again, your doom is sealed."

By degrees Leary recovered the full use of his limbs, and found that, notwithstanding the desperate struggle which he had had with Dicks' ruffians, he was but little bruised.

He groped his way about the vault, feeling carefully on every side, back and forth on the rough stone-work, until his eyes becoming accustomed to the dim light from above were capable of distinguishing something of the nature of place.

"This must be a cellar vault," he said, "and contrived for this purpose. How many poor wretches have gone to their fate in torture and misery within the darkness and tomb-like silence of this place! Ugh! it smells like a sepulchre!"

He had no idea of time, there. How long he had been there, whether it was a day, a week, or a month, he had no conception.

It seemed to him that the struggle with the ruffians and his desperate but fruitless resistance had occurred months before, and that he had been lying in a stupor ever since.

He found bread and a piece of meat on the plate beside the straw pallet upon which he had lain.

"Certainly they don't want to poison me," he said, as he greedily devoured it. "If they do—ho—what is that?"

He paused in his eating.

"I thought I heard a human voice, the groans of some one suffering."

He listened intently.

The sound seemed to proceed from the wall beside him, as if it were hollow and within its hollowness a human being might be in agony, and moaning for assistance.

"Can it be possible that there is another victim hidden away in this living tomb?" Again and again Leary went the round of his narrow prison.

After a while in doing this his foot struck against something hard—something that had the ring of metal.

He stooped and took it up.

It was—he could tell by feeling it more than by the dim view he got of it—the blade of an old chisel.

He sat down on his pallet and examined it as thoroughly as if it were a nugget of gold and his life depended upon his ascertaining its value.

"I have read," he thought "of men cast into prison cells where only darkness and the rats could be felt or known, who have inch by inch worked their way through wall after wall until they were free; worked it with a bit of nail. Why shouldn't I be able to free myself with this old rusty piece of chisel? I can at least forget my misery in trying the work. That'll be something anyhow."

Two days passed on.

Twice while he slept, by some silent, mysterious method had good and fresh water been brought into his cell and placed within his reach.

Twice, too, had he caught indistinctly the sound of that moaning in the wall.

"These walls must be solid, there is no sign of a break, except that narrow iron door; that seems harder and more impenetrable than the stone and plaster."

Here and there with the chisel he began to test them.

The plaster or cement was hard apparently with age. The stones had settled into it as firmly as if it were a part of themselves.

More carefully than anywhere else he picked at the side from which the faint sound of the groan had seemed to proceed.

"Hard as fate. Hard as the heart of the wretch, Kennard Dicks," over and over again he repeated.

Still, hour after hour, with intervals of rest, he picked here and there at the plaster between the stones.

He tried hard to remain awake, too, in order that he might know the time when his food was brought in, but even in this he failed.

Once he awoke from his uneasy slumber, and thought he heard the sound of the clanging of the iron door.

He sprang to his feet and ran to it. It was as solid as the wall in which it was set.

He listened for the sound of retreating footsteps.

But all was silent, so silent that to him in the intense strain upon his sense of hearing, the throbbing of his heart sounded like the dull tapping of his fingers upon the cold stones.

Suddenly there came a gleam of hope.

"The water, why didn't I think of it before? I'll try it. If it fails I'll be no worse off than before."

He took up the bottle in which the water was brought to him, and began, without wasting it, to dampen the plastering in one particular spot.

It was slow work.

The plaster remained hard and seemed waterproof.

But he persevered, and with the patience of a man to whom time was nothing and the accomplishment of his task all the world, he toiled on.

At last, toward the close of the third day, he uttered an exclamation of delight.

The plaster had evidently softened near the center of the wall from whence the groaning seemed to proceed.

A bit at a time, under the pecking and prying of the old chisel, the plaster came out. Every little piece that came out and dropped upon the ground brought its share of hope to Leary.

He seemed to grow stronger, and he felt that the hour of release and vengeance was coming nearer and nearer.

Pausing to wet the plaster, waiting now, not with patience, but with a feverish longing for the plaster to absorb the water, then digging away with the chisel, he saw in the future a reward for all that he suffered.

When worn down and exhausted, he threw himself upon his pallet of straw, only to awaken after an hour or two of sleep to find his food and water renewed.

"If I could only grapple once with the wretch who brings me this meat and water—this digging my way out to liberty wouldn't have to be done. I wonder how he finds out that I am asleep. Is he or some one of the gang always watching me through some crevice in the door? There must be a way—yet, if they could look in here at any time, they would see me at work on the wall."

Two or three times while he was at work, digging around the stone, he heard faintly the repetition of the groans from within.

"Perhaps in working my way out, I may find another victim like myself—dying, perhaps," said Leary, with his old habit of talking to himself. "Dying, and with a curse on his lips for Kennard Dicks."

Hour after hour, all that day, he worked and picked almost unceasingly.

At last he had worked out nearly all the plaster around one of the stones, and by prying at it, using his chisel as a sort of lever, he moved it.

Gradually he worked it out.

"One mile stone nearer the end of my journey!" he cried.

Fortunately the stone which he had taken out was of no great thickness, as its breath and height outside would have indicated.

He found that behind this, thrown in as filling, the stones were small and the cement broken, and much more pliable than that upon the outer surface.

One by one these smaller ones were taken out and placed under his pillow.

Then he began tapping the surface of the inner stone at the back.

There was no solidity to the sound. It echoed hollowly.

"That stone out, and I can creep through into the place beyond—whatever it is."

He redoubled his efforts now. There was no thought of pause for sleep, or rest, or food.

As he dug away, suddenly, plainly, and more than ever distinctly came the repetition of the groan beyond.

"There is another vault like this with its prisoner."

As nearly as he could calculate, it was at this moment the close of the day.

"I have all night before me," was his thought; "and if some of my odd luck doesn't come up to balk me, I'll know the secret of the other side of this wall. I'll not sleep till I do know it, whatever happens."

The mortar slowly gave way, what with the incessant alternation of water and chisel, and after three long hours of constant toil, Leary felt that this last obstacle to his progress would soon be at his mercy.

CHAPTER XXV.

LEARY FINDS THE REAL KENNARD DICKS IN THE OTHER VAULT—LEARY BRINGS DOWN TWO BIRDS WITH ONE BOTTLE—"NOW FOR LIGHT, LIBERTY AND VENGEANCE."

"THERE!"

And there it was, sure enough, for giving the stone one vigorous push by the exertion of his whole strength, this last barrier fell inwards and struck the ground with a dull, heavy thud.

At the same moment the sound of a voice in tremulous, feeble accents exclaimed:

"Don't kill me! Don't kill me!"

Leary started back, for the instant, horror-stricken.

The voice was so awful, coming up, as it were, out of the darkness of that horrible place, so like the last weird wail of one dying; so weak, so piteous, yet so clear, that it seemed to Leary as if every stone took up the cry and prolonged it in his ears.

Again the appeal was repeated, this time with a groan.

This, then, was the one whom he had heard through the wall.

Leary crept to the iron door. Had there been a dozen men shuffling their feet upon the stone flagging without, he could not have heard them through its thickness.

Then he returned to the opening he had made in the wall.

The voice was silent, but he heard a rustling as of some one lying upon a bed of straw.

"If I can crawl through—but stop! Suppose some of the wretches should open the iron door—they'd see my work quickly enough—I'll wait. An hour or two will not make any difference. I'll try and sham sleep once more, perhaps this time I may catch them entering to bring me my water and food."

The broad, flat stone which he had first removed, he replaced in the opening, thus closing the aperture.

Then he lay down upon his pallet to make pretense of sleep, with every nerve strung to its utmost tension, and his heart beating a tattoo of hope and fear.

An hour passed, and then an hour more, and Leary resolved to wait no longer.

But just as he was about to rise and put an end to this racking suspense, there was a jar of the iron door. Then he heard the turning of a key, then the clang of a heavy iron bar striking in its socket.

Leary remained motionless save such motion as would indicate the heavy, regular breathing of a man sleeping soundly.

Slowly the door opened, and the dim partly shaded light of a lantern shone into the vault.

Then the bearer of the lantern noiselessly entered:

"Sh—the old paste-pot's asleep," said the man with the lantern.

"If he wasn't you wouldn't be here," was the whispered answer of the one who followed.

"What's the use of the appen a keepin' this bloke in this way. Why not knock 'em on the head—"

"Sh!" The man with the lantern moved as silently as a specter to the place where the bottle of water was standing.

Leary saw every movement of these men from under the shadow of his arm which he had thrown partly over his face and so concealing his eyes.

"Capen'll have to move him out of this soon."

The man with the lantern made no reply. He placed the lantern upon the ground.

"I'll give this duffer his grub, and then we'll give the other one a visit."

As he said this his comrade turned toward the half open door.

"Bring in the fresh water and bread," said the man with the lantern.

A wild uncontrollable impulse seized upon Leary. An impulse to make one desperate effort to turn the tables upon these ruffians, and so effect his escape by speedier means than the slow process of digging his way out through more walls.

He could but fail. If he failed—well, that would end his hopes.

They were two to one. They were doubtless armed and ready for any such attempt, but he knew that by a sudden surprise he would be for the moment more than their match.

The comrade of the man was on the threshold of the narrow, iron door, with his back toward the interior of the vault.

The other was stooping to take up the broken plate upon which the bill-poster's daily allowance was placed.

This was the supreme moment.

A better chance might never again occur.

Springing to his feet from the pallet, and grasping the water bottle by the neck—the flash of lightning could scarcely have been quicker than was the movement of Leary, as he brought the weapon crashing down upon the head of the ruffian nearest him.

The action was so instantaneous and the blow so effectual, that he fell as limp as a wet cloth to the ground without a cry.

Leary leaped toward the door, with the bottle still clutched in his upraised hand.

The remaining ruffian was in the act of turning on the threshold to re-enter.

In the amazement at seeing Leary before him, he uttered an oath and dropped the plate which he held in his hand. That oath was all that escaped his lips.

For in the same instant that he beheld Leary, the bill-poster's weapon levelled him to the floor. As he fell, his head struck against the edge of the iron door, and that completed the work.

Like his companion he lay helpless, stunned, and at the mercy of the bill-poster.

"Now, for freedom and vengeance!" exclaimed Leary. "Oh, you ruffians, my vengeance is not for you, but for your master."

He stepped outside the vault, taking the lantern with him.

Upon the wall he saw hanging to a huge iron spike a coil of rope. Hastily taking it down he re-entered the vault.

"Now, you rascals, we'll see how you like the little game your master played on me. If he's waiting for you now, I'm thinking he'll wait an hour or two longer."

With the rope, which he found to be in two or three pieces, he proceeded to effectually tie and bind the two men, hands and arms fast to their sides, and their legs tightly together.

Then, hastily tearing off a portion of the coat of one of them, he crammed it into his mouth as a gag.

He did the same with the other, only in this instance using the crown of the ruffian's old felt hat as the gag.

"There, you're comfortable enough now. Lie there and be happy."

His next movement was to close the iron door. He found the key in the outer lock. Securing that, he locked the door on the inner side.

"So far all is safe."

Then he removed the stone from the opening in the wall.

"That was a tough job, but it has paid for itself," said Leary; taking up the lantern after looking to make sure that the two ruffians were fast, he began the task of creeping through the opening into the next vault.

It was a difficult task he had in getting through, but he finally succeeded in squeezing himself through.

The dim light of the lantern made the vault's appearance plain enough. It was similar to the one in size in which he had been confined, but the air was close, and the rank and foul odors that filled it were sickening.

It smelled more like a charnel house or a morgue filled with the festering remains of the unburied dead. Leary shuddered.

As he held the lantern up, looking around the horrible place, he started back as suddenly as if a hissing serpent had reared itself at his feet.

Far from the ground like a voice from the grave came once again that weird wail, this time shaping itself into the words, "Mercy—mercy!"

Recovering himself he lowered the lantern and saw

what seemed to be a bundle of rags, from out of which peered the thin, ghostly mockery of a human face. The skin was drawn tightly to the bones of the cheek, the hair was long and matted about the forehead and out of the shadow of the sunken brow peered the dulled eyes. The lips thin and partly opened with the white teeth, visible, completed this horrible sight.

A thin hand like the hand of a skeleton was partly raised from out of the rags and fell back again.

"Mercy—mercy!" repeated the voice.

Leary placed the lantern upon the ground and kneeling beside the awful death-like figure placed his hand under its head and as tenderly as possible raised it up.

"You—you—" gasped the poor wreck. "You are not—the—the—" then the lips closed, and the head fell back on Leary's arm.

"Be quiet now. I am not one of the ruffians who put you in this den. I have come to rescue you, to bring you back to life and light and the world."

"You, I—life—oh yes, I know the other world—yes—yes."

"Wait a moment," said Leary.

He arose and crawled back through the opening into the other vault, and came back, scarcely heeding the struggle it occasioned, bringing with him the bottle of fresh water.

"Here drink this, drink it—it will revive you. I wish it was something stronger."

He placed the bottle to the poor fellow's lips, and he drank eagerly—as ravenously as if it were nectar.

The water in a few moments revived him, and he seemed to have freer use of speech.

"Who—are—you?" the thin lips said, and the dull eyes brightened as they rested upon the kindly, pitying face of the bill-poster.

"Me—why, I'm Red Leary, the bill-poster—that is," Leary added, smiling grimly, "when I'm not under lock and key."

"Where is—the old woman that lured me into that den, Nancy Grip—so many weeks—months—I can't tell—so long ago."

"Nancy Grip!" exclaimed Leary. "Yes—yes, I know who she is."

Then Leary thought of the closing words of the cypher note she had dropped in front of Kennard Dick's house—"Come to me about the prisoner."

"You are one of her—her con—confederates!"

"No, no," cried Leary, quickly. "Don't think it, I must get you out of here some way. Are you able to stand up, to walk?"

"I—I'll try."

"Then do so at once. I have been a prisoner here myself. I have got the best of the ruffians. You must leave here with me. You shall go if I have to carry you. But first tell me your name!"

"My name?" said the poor victim of ill treatment.

"Yes, your name!"

"It is—it is Kennard Dicks."

"Kennard Dicks!" exclaimed Leary in astonishment.

"Yes, that is my name!"

"Now, by the saint of all the bill-posters, the secret is out, the infernal villain. Oh, ho! that's why the milk is in the cocoa-nut! You are Kennard Dicks, eh? Then, why were you kept here?"

"I do not know. It is too long a story to tell now. I'm too weak, wait, I'll tell you by-and-bye. They decoyed me into a trap."

"They?"

"Yes, an old woman and a man, the man first; they drugged me. I'll tell you, it's a horrible story, horrible!"

"Yes, but not more horrible than will be the fate of the black-hearted John Brandon, the midnight murderer of Charley Didier's brother, on that East River pier. But come, try and get up. I'll have you out of here if I have to break my way through a dozen such walls as that. Come, Mister Dicks, you are safe, now."

With some difficulty he raised the victim to his feet, and helping him he managed to stand erect.

Then Leary, half supporting him, led him toward the opening in the wall.

"You'll be strong enough directly," said Leary. "I will have to pull you through this opening some way or other without hurting you."

Then Leary, leaving the new found Kennard Dicks at the opening, crawled through into the other vault, taking the lantern with him.

One of the ruffians was writhing in his bonds, vainly struggling to free himself.

"Squirm away, my pretty bird," said Leary.

Then he took a survey of the other one near the door. The fellow was quiet enough, but his sharp eyes were fixed upon Leary with a look that told the bill-poster plainly his feelings, and what Leary's fate would be if he should happen to get loose.

"You're another good looking bird of prey," said Leary. "How do you like it? Teach you to keep away from the bottle—it's too much for your poor head. You ain't the only scoundrel that's been brought down by the bottle, so put that in your pipe and smoke it."

The fellow's face, distorted as it was with the portion of felt hat which had been crammed into it, assumed a diabolical expression as Leary uttered the taunting words.

"Now, my fine fellows—my cheery mocking birds, I'm going through you."

CHAPTER XXVI.

KENNARD DICKS GETS A NEW JOHN BRANDON IN STABBER THE BARKEEPER—NANCY GRIP IN THE HOSPITAL—CAPT. SEAFOAM LOCKS THE DOOR AND DRAWS A PISTOL.

LEAVING Mr. Gimblet to wait impatiently the return of the boy from his mission in following the wagon in which Bullseye and Jim were taking away Red Leary's household goods, and to worry himself over the idea

that Leary was in league with a band of desperadoes, let us turn to Mr. Kennard Dicks.

As he passed on, he saw Gimblet, and at once suspected his motive in waiting near the entrance to Leary's garret home.

That troubled him very little, for he had another matter upon his mind.

There was a dim, vague foreboding in his mind that something terrible was about to happen to him, to mar all his schemes and bring him to a fearful retribution.

That day he was to take to Captain Seafoam, and introduce him, John Brandon.

This John Brandon he had found in one of his associates in villainy.

It was the barkeeper at Joss' Corner. He had dressed him in a plain inexpensive suit of black, and had transformed him into an appearance approaching respectability.

He was on his way to meet Stabber, the barkeeper, when he saw Gimblet.

He crossed the street and just in time to catch the ear of Bullseye, at the wagon.

"Bullseye," he said in a low tone, "you're watched."

"Who by?"

"Gimblet, the detective!"

"Oh, ho, captain. Then we'll watch him."

"See that you do."

"Where is he?"

"After I've walked on a piece away from you, as you drive off, look behind you sharply. D'ye take?"

"Yes, captain; I'm fly."

"You'd better leave Jim to watch him and you drive off alone."

"All right, never fear, captain. You'll see us to-night?"

"Yes, at Joss', at twelve."

Kennard Dicks—little dreaming that while he was on his way to present to Captain Seafoam a second John Brandon, Leary had already discovered a second and a real Kennard Dicks—went to the rendezvous and met Stabber, the barkeeper.

"Now then, Stabber," said Dicks, "be careful. One slip of your tongue, and you'll spoil the whole game. Remember there's ten thousand dollars as the prize; and your pay for this day's work, if you succeed and do the job well, is two thousand."

"If the old deck-treader should drop to our little game?"

"Then we get nothing except the chance of being pulled for an attempt at swindling."

"Comforting, that, isn't it, captain, eh?"

"Yes, for you. Now, come on."

They walked on together to the hotel which the captain had designated as the place of meeting.

The barkeeper, so far, had played his part excellently. But the worst was to come, for Captain Seafoam was a bird not so easily caught with chaff.

They were—this nice pair—on the point of entering the great doorway of the hotel, Stabber being the foremost.

"Mr. Dicks."

Kennard Dicks turned and saw a man who touched him on the shoulder as he spoke.

"Well, sir?" said Dicks, looking at him suspiciously.

"You forget me, but I know you," said the stranger, bowing.

"Well, sir?" said Kennard Dicks.

"I have followed you nearly a block. I was on my way to your house when I caught sight of you."

"What did you wish to see me for?"

"I have a message for you. I am one of the surgeons of the Park Hospital. An old woman was brought there early in the morning in a dying condition."

Dicks started and gave Stabber a meaning glance.

"She was found bleeding and insensible, lying on the ground close to a fence, by a policeman, a few doors from a notorious den known as Joss' Corner. Near her were the overalls, bucket, bills and brush of a bill-poster."

"Well—well, how does this concern me?"

"Only in this way. She was taken to the station and from thence brought to our hospital. She recovered sufficiently some hours since to speak, and she wanted—asked that you be sent for. She gave her name as Nancy Grip. She is a wretched-looking object."

"I suppose so," said Dicks, disconcerted, yet giving but little outward display of it; "but what does she want me for?"

"That she will not say. But she says you must come. You know her?"

"Y-es, I do remember some such woman. She was once my washerwoman or something of the sort. But it was so long ago that really I had forgotten her."

"Likely," said the surgeon; "but will you come? We sent one messenger, but he did not find you at home."

Dicks hesitated before he replied. Then he answered, "yes."

"Come soon."

"As soon as I am through with a little business I have in the hotel."

The surgeon was about going away when Dicks called him.

"You said you knew me—when have we met?"

"At Garouse's, the banker's residence."

"Oh, yes," but Dicks did not remember.

"Besides your face is the better remembered by me, because it has a strange resemblance to the face of a person, who, some months since, called three or four times at the hospital, inquiring concerning the condition of a sea captain named Seafoam. That person, however, was evidently a fellow of not much account, judging by his dress. Well, you'll be sure and come. Good-day, sir."

The surgeon went his way, leaving Dicks staring after him.

"Stabber, that cursed old hag means mischief."

"She never meant anything else in all her born days."

"I thought that kick I gave the treacherous old witch had settled her."

"I don't think anything'll ever settle her, unless it be about two good solid pounds of strychnine, or a quart of bug poison. She's been shot and knifed, choked, chucked off the pier and half hanged, and it had no more effect on her than a dose of our gin."

"I must see her, at all events. But first we'll go in and begin our work on the captain."

"Come on."

"After I introduce you as John Brandon, I will leave you with him. But don't forget—don't lose a trick."

"You bet I won't. If he don't take me in as Jack Brandon, you may put me down for a second class duffer."

They entered the hotel.

Dicks sent up his card.

"Captain Seafoam will see you," said the servant.

Stabber and Dicks were shown up to the captain's room.

Dicks was the first to enter, Stabber following close behind.

Captain Seafoam was sitting at a center table, examining some papers.

As Dicks came in, the captain arose and bowed.

The servant retired, closing the door after him.

"You are prompt," said Seafoam.

"I am always prompt to oblige," was Dicks' answer; "and after some trouble in finding him, permit me to present to you Mr. John Brandon. Mr. Brandon, this is Captain Seafoam, the friend of your late father."

Stabber stepped up briskly and held out his hand to the captain who reached out his bronzed fingers slowly, looking Stabber, much to that individual's disgust, steadily and sternly in the face.

"Be seated," said the captain.

Then Dicks, as Stabber seated himself, explained to the captain that business of great importance called him away, and that he would leave them together. In a moment more Dicks was gone and on his way to the hospital.

"So you are John Brandon?" said the captain eyeing Stabber.

"Yes, sir," answered Stabber boldly.

The captain stepped to the door and locked it. Stabber didn't like this proceeding. The captain then, from a drawer in the table took out a pistol, cocked it, seated himself opposite Stabber, and then placed the weapon on the table before him. For the first time in his life Stabber felt that his face turned pale. He moved uneasily and he avoided meeting the captain's chance, although he kept his eye upon the pistol. He began to think the captain was either a lunatic or had by some unknown means penetrated their secret and had adopted this means to entrap him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LEARY AND THE REAL KENNARD DICKS ESCAPE FROM THE VAULTS OF JOSS CORNER—DEATH OF A TRAITOR—"NOW FOR VENGEANCE."

WHILE Stabber, playing the part of John Brandon, was sitting, trembling at the singular method adopted by the captain of receiving him, by locking the door and placing a pistol before him on the table; while Kennard Dicks was on his way to the hospital to hear the dying words of Nancy Grip, and while Mr. Gimblet was in feverish impatience awaiting the return of the boy he had sent as a spy to follow Bullseye and Jim with the household goods of the bill-poster, Red Leary and the real Kennard Dicks were closely making their way out of the vaults beneath the den at Joss Corner.

The two ruffians lay helplessly gagged and bound, and only their eyes, watching their two captors, expressed their terrible but useless rage.

Leary opened the door leading from the vault to the arched passage, and taking the real Kennard Dicks by the hand, led him out from the shadows and murky air in which he had suffered for so many weeks.

"These are the words, liberty and vengeance," said Leary.

"Vengeance to the death," murmured Dicks. "Without it I'd rather go back to that vault and rot there."

Leary turned and locked the heavy iron doors.

"There, my fine birds, you can have a taste of the fun you gave me," he said.

They could have made no answer had they heard him.

"The wretches! I wish—no—that I will learn hereafter—but if they have murdered Charles Didier—if they have —"

"Sh!" whispered his companion.

Leary listened.

"I hear nothing."

"I did—the sound of someone heavily breathing. Listen."

"Ah, I hear now. Whoever it is, he is not far off."

They were now in the room beyond the arched passage, the place where Dicks and his pals slept.

By the light of the lantern Leary and his companion advanced to the table. Upon it were a bottle and two or three glasses. The bottle contained brandy.

"Oh, ho," said Leary. "My poor friend, here is something that will revive you. There is strength in this."

The two men took each a drink of the liquor.

"That's as good as a turkey dinner on Thanksgiving day," said Leary, smacking his lips. "Now then let us make our way out into daylight."

Again, and more plainly, the sound as of someone heavily breathing came to their ears—this time nearer and more distinct.

"There is some one sleeping near where we are," said Dicks, in a whisper.

But although the sound still came to them at intervals, they could find no trace of the one who made it.

"But how are we to escape from this hole? There must be a way out of it, surely," said Leary.

Just then Leary approached the further wall opposite the entrance to the vaults.

"There is some one on the other side of this wall," said Leary; "I hear the turning of a key in a lock. It is rusty and turns hard, and the man is swearing over it."

The words had barely escaped his lips when a concealed door—the same by which it will be remembered the ruffians had entered with their captain—was pushed open.

Fortunately Leary and his companion were close to the wall, and as the door opened they were behind it. Consequently the man who entered did not see them. He stepped in, little suspecting how close he was to an enemy.

"Where the devil are the boys?" he grumbled. He saw the lantern which Leary had placed upon the table. "There's the glim, but where are they? Cuss the luck, I wish the captain would 'tend to his own business. He's got too much on hand for one man to carry." The man stepped toward the table. Leary recognized him as one of the gang who had rushed upon him in the bar-room. As he stood by the table he took the bottle in his hand, and poured out a portion of the brandy into one of the glasses. Behind him, eyeing his every movement was Leary, waiting for the moment when the suspense should be ended.

It came.

As the man raised the glass to his lips Leary sprang upon him. He was taken so completely by surprise, that before he realized the situation, or the cause of this sudden attack, Leary had thrown his strong arms about him and flung him upon his back to the floor.

An oath from the astonished ruffian, a brief but desperate struggle and Leary, with his knees upon his breast, and his hands grasping tightly at his throat, held him helpless at his mercy.

"Now then, Number Three, I've got you. Dicks, here, if he attempts to make any more trouble, do you knock him on the head with those keys."

"Dicks?" repeated the ruffian, turning his glance as far as Leary's clutch at his throat permitted. "Dicks?"

"Yes, not your Captain Dicks, my lovely gutter-snipe, but the one whose name he has taken; now then, are you ready to give up and be quiet, or shall we put an end to your troubles just as we did to your pals?"

"Take your—your hand from my throat."

"Not if I know myself, my jolly night owl. I say, Dicks, take a search through this gentle lamb's pockets."

The ruffian made an ineffectual struggle to free himself. The effort was useless. The grasp of Leary was the grasp of a vise, and his strength of a man who had nerved himself to accomplish his purpose or die in the attempt.

Dicks was by no means a coward. It was not fear but weakness which made him tremble, as he searched pocket after pocket.

The result of the search was an advantage to Leary, for it produced a loaded revolver, a villainous-looking "black-jack," a bunch of keys, and a small roll of bills.

"Is that shooting-iron loaded?"

"Yes, every barrel," said Dicks.

"That's all right. You hold fast to that black-jack, and hand me the pistol."

Loosening one hand from the ruffian's throat, Leary took the pistol, and then suddenly leaping from the prostrate man to his feet, he cocked the pistol and pointing the muzzle at his head exclaimed:

"Now you can breathe and speak, but if you attempt to rise or utter a cry of alarm until I'm through with you, I'll blow your brains out with as little remorse as I would kill a rat. D'ye understand?"

The situation was too plain for the ruffian to misunderstand. He saw that to comply was safety, to attempt resistance would not only be folly, but end in death.

"Well," he growled, "you've got me foul, and that's the good it'll do you."

"Is it? That remains to be seen," said Leary. "You'll do one good act, anyhow."

"Will I?"

"Yes, or else take a pill or two from this revolving box. One'll be a dose for you. You must show us the easiest and safest way to get out of here."

"And then what?"

"Lie still—don't try it—or off goes this pepper box. When we are out of this den and free, you can go to the devil," said Leary.

"With a policeman?"

"No. You're too small game to bother with. It's your master I shall take care of in that line. You will show us the way out of this."

The ruffian's face lighted up. He thought he saw a chance, by pretending to submit to this idea, of turning the tables on his captors.

Leary, watching him intently, understood the meaning of this sudden change of expression.

"But the first movement, after I let you up, that is not on the square, in goes a bullet into your carcass, where it will give your soul a holiday in the lower regions."

The ruffian gritted his teeth.

"That's natural," said Leary. "You're one of the right sort—you are. Now, then, get up."

Covered by Leary's pistol, the ruffian slowly rose to his feet, and stood scowling and watchful in front of Leary.

"Now, then, are you ready?"

"As I ever will be."

"Understand," said Leary, "the minute I am free, you can go where you please; and further, should I ever see you again, you shall not be molested. Is it a bargain?"

"And you will not betray me to any of my pals for this day's work?"

"No; because I don't care to meet them anywhere except in the hands of the law."

"If I refuse?"

"I'll kill you as surely as you stand there."

"It's a bargain. Will you follow me?"

"Rather. You don't s'pose I'd let you get behind us, do you?"

"Then follow me, and be careful how you step."

"And you be careful how you act, for I will keep a bead drawn on you with this popgun of yours until we are in the open street."

"Come, then, give me the lantern from the table."

"Oh, no, we'll carry that. Don't trouble yourself. You found your way here in the darkness; we will light you out."

The ruffian turned toward the door by which he had entered.

Directly behind him, almost in a lock step, followed Leary with the upraised pistol. After him came Kennard Dicks holding the lantern.

Once the thought struck the ruffian that by a sudden spring through the doorway and pulling the door shut he might have them in his power.

But a glance at Leary satisfied him that such an attempt would result in the discharge of the pistol.

He led them into the dark cellar beneath the room adjoining the bar-room.

Then he paused.

"Let me fix the ladder."

"What ladder?"

"Don't you see. It leads to the trap in the floor above."

"What is the floor above?"

"The next room to the bar."

"Who is in that room?"

"No one."

"Are you sure of that?" demanded Leary, suspiciously.

"Yes. Stabber, the bar-keeper, is off with the captain on an expedition, and our men are always away in the day-time."

"How is it you and the other two men, your pals, are here?"

"We were left home by the captain to take care of things."

"Well, you're doing it now. Fix the ladder."

Taking as much time as he could, and never for an instant removing his eyes from Leary and his pointed pistol, he raised the light ladder and placed it in position.

"Now, then, stop," said Leary.

"Well?" growled the man.

"Before we go further, I want you to answer a question."

"Well," repeated the man.

"In that den where we trapped you, we heard the sound as of some one heavily breathing."

"That was me."

"No. Through the thickness of the door and the wall we could not have heard it."

"There is nobody in that room, nor any place where any one could be shut up or hidden."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes."

"Now, then, go up the ladder. Remember this pistol covers you."

"I don't forget it," said the ruffian hoarsely.

His foot was upon the ladder. Within arm's length of him Leary stood waiting to follow. The pistol was still pointing like a finger of fate, and upon the two the lantern held up in the hands of Dicks threw upon the group a dismal ghostly light.

For the instant there was silence.

Then it was broken.

At that moment of silence, Leary's pistol was inadvertently lowered. The ruffian saw his opportunity. From the ladder he made a rush at Leary, and almost accomplished his purpose of grasping the pistol.

But Leary on the instant sprang back, and raised the pistol. He saw there was no other alternative. He fired, and the ruffian staggered back with a cry of baffled rage, against the ladder, and then fell to the ground.

"The lantern, Dicks, quick!" cried Leary.

Dicks held it closer.

Leary stooped over the man. The bill-poster saw that the shot had done its work. The blood was oozing from the man's forehead.

"Poor fellow," said Leary, "his race is run. It is the first—I pray Heaven it may be the last time I shall ever be obliged to do the like."

"The boy—captain—breathing—closet—I—" and from those quivering lips never more came words of good or ill. A spasm, a contraction of the limbs, and the shadow of death crept over the rugged face.

"He was true to his master here," said Leary, solemnly turning toward the ladder—"but—well maybe he never thought he had a master above. Come, Dicks, when we get out of this we can send the police."

Leary led the way up the ladder. Giving the trap door a push, it raised. Pushing it back they climbed into the room.

It was, as the man had stated, deserted.

There was the table, with bottles, glasses, and a greasy pack of cards upon it, the old chairs, and that was all.

They passed out into the bar-room. It, too, was closed.

"The poor wretch told the truth as far as he went," said Leary.

"It was a pity it had not been the head of the gang you shot," said Dicks.

"He'll get his deserts in good time," answered Leary.

He opened the door leading from the bar to the street.

It was broad daylight yet, and the sun shone bright and cheery.

"Free at last," said Dicks, his pale face lighting up with an expression of happiness.

"Now for vengeance," said Leary.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NANCY GRIP Baffles Kennard Dicks—Even in her death she triumphs—the interview with the surgeon—Dicks tries a game with Bullseye.

Kennard Dicks hurried on to the hospital in the park.

He began to think the fates were against him. A fear had come over him that in some way or other Stabber would make a failure of his attempt to personate John Brandon.

He knew that the least word out of the way might arouse the captain's suspicion.

Then another thought came. He had deceived—short-sighted in that—his confederate and tool, Stabber, as to the amount involved, and had placed it at ten thousand instead of a million dollars.

"Now, fool that I was—he will learn that a million is the stake I am playing for. The captain will tell him, and—I dare not prevent it without exposing myself, Stabber will chisel me out of it, grasp the great fortune of my father, and laugh at me. What a fool I was. And this old faggot—Nancy Grip, curse her, she won't even die peaceably with her tongue quiet. Never mind, I'll circumvent them all yet. I have raised myself from the dregs by my own wits, and by my own wits will I keep where I am."

He knew he had, as he imagined, disposed of Leary and had him and Charles Didier safe within his power.

As for the package of diamonds belonging to his friend Garouse, he chuckled when he thought of how nicely he had outwitted them all in that robbery.

"One fox is worth a thousand donkeys," he said, as he went up the narrow, outside iron stairway leading to the second floor of the hospital; "now to settle this old hag, if death has not already settled her for me."

He met the surgeon, who at once led him into the reception room. There was a serious look upon his face.

"I am sorry," he said, "Mr. Dicks, but you are too late."

"Too late!"

"Yes. She died ten minutes ago."

"Poor old soul," said Dicks, assuming an expression of sorrow.

"Up to the last she retained her senses—which is something unusual in a case like hers."

"And wanting to see me so bad—did she leave no message for me?"

"Yes. Within the past half hour one of the nurses, at her request, wrote this note at her dictation." The surgeon took a scrap of paper from the table. "It is directed, as you see, to yourself."

Dicks took the note, opened it and read—what did he read?

Only that once again he was balked. Even in death the woman held him in her grasp. Even in death, grim and stark, her power was greater than his in life, and she had avenged herself for all the insults, abuse and violence he had inflicted upon her—she who had served him so faithfully.

The missive read simply:

"You will not come to me. My secret must not die with me. Yesterday, in all my pain, I wrote out the history of—you know what. I betray nothing in this when I say that, in what I wrote, I betrayed all. Had you come I might have ——— NANCY."

The sentence was broken off.

"Curse the hag!" muttered Dicks savagely. Then looking up at the surgeon he said:

"She says she wrote something else, doctor."

"Yes. Oh, yes. That she scrawled herself, sealed it in an envelope, and directed it, leaving it in my care to deliver only to the one to whom it was addressed."

"That was to me, of course."

"No; your name was not mentioned."

"To whom, then, was it directed or addressed?"

"To Mr. Leary, bill-poster."

"To him?"

"Yes," replied the surgeon.

"Oh, ah, yes, now I remember," said Dicks, carelessly, as if all his personal interest in the matter had ceased. "This Leary was a friend of hers. I know him very well. He has done work for me. By the way, I may see him to-day. Give me the letter, whatever it is, and I will hand it to him."

The surgeon smiled. Did he understand Dicks' little game?

"No. That is against our rules," he said calmly. "We always, even in a hospital, respect the wishes, and as far as possible, obey the last request of the dying who are in our charge."

Dicks had nothing to say. He felt that luck was against him.

"I shall see that Mr. Leary gets this note. If you should see him, Mr. Dicks, you will be kind enough to tell him that we have a note or letter here for him from this woman, and that he can call and get it."

"Yes—yes, I will," replied Dicks. "But, by the way," he repeated the words, "do you know this man, this bill-poster Leary?"

"I never saw him in my life," answered the surgeon frankly.

That was the answer Dicks longed for. It brought new hope to him. "My way is clear now," he thought. "I'll have that letter before night-fall."

Then to the surgeon he said: "I will see this Leary this afternoon, and send him to you. The note may contain something of importance to him."

"Very well. You do me a favor. Any time between now and twelve o'clock to-night. If I should not be here, my assistant will deliver the envelope to him. Would you like to look at the—the—"

"At the body. No," was the answer.

The surgeon smiled strangely. Why he should smile

was a puzzle to Dicks. There seemed to be a meaning in it very significant.

"What disposition shall we make of her?"

"I cannot bury her in Potters' field?" replied Dicks, curtly, pulling on his gloves.

"As you please," said the surgeon.

Kennard Dicks left the hospital.

"I'll find a Leary to answer the purpose," said Dicks to himself. "I'll send Bullseye. He'll do the job. He's fond of such little games. Specially when he's paid for it. He can act the bill-poster or any other part, except that of an honest man."

He had nearly reached his house, when turning the corner, he came face to face with the very man of whom he had been thinking—Bullseye.

"Bullseye."

"Well, captain?"

"You're the very man I want."

"I'm here, safe and ready."

"First, did you dodge Gimblet?"

"What d'ye take me for? A nod's as good as a wink to a blind man. Dodge him? I rather think I did. Besides, I don't think he was 'piping' us."

"Don't be too sure of that. Gimblet's no fool. See here, I've a job for you."

"Good. Will it pay?"

"Yes; money to you—satisfaction to me."

"I'm your worm; what is it?"

"I want you to be somebody else for an hour or two."

"Me, somebody else? I don't exactly take that in."

"I'll explain as we walk along. You know old Nance Grip is dead."

"No."

"Yes. Now listen," said Dicks. Then he told Bullseye what he wanted, and instructed him what to say in reply, should the surgeon question him.

"I'm fly, cap'n. You shall have that letter, or whatever it is, before dark."

"And you shall have your reward."

Dicks parted from his confederate and entered his house, where he waited not only for the coming of Stabber from his interview with Captain Seaweed, but for the return of Bullseye with the secret of Nancy Grip.

"I dreamed last night that I saw a raven circling around in the air; gradually the circles of its flight narrowed until at last it perched upon my shoulder. It is a bad sign. Danger is around me, and I must beware or the end will come too quickly."

So thought Dicks as he threw himself for an hour's rest upon the lounge in his sitting-room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. STABBER AS JOHN BRANDON, AND CAPTAIN SEAWEEP—THE PISTOL ON THE TABLE—THE CAPTAIN DEMANDS PROOF—STABBER PINNED DOWN.

"So you are really John Brandon, the son of my old friend?" said Captain Seaweed. "You don't resemble your father any more than a capstan looks like an anchor fluke. You think strange of my precautions in locking the door and placing this pistol before me? Well, it's a way I have of making sure of things in this city of depravity. There's nothing like being ready to clear the deck."

Stabber did think the whole proceeding strange, and began to wish he hadn't undertaken the little job.

"There's a screw loose somewhere," he thought.

"When I first began my inquiries after John Brandon, I visited Kennard Dicks to get a clue to your whereabouts, and before I left him I found that a pistol would have been an exceedingly handy article to have."

Stabber changed his position uneasily.

"When did you see your father last?" asked the captain.

"Eight years ago."

"Correct. You ran away from home because of a crime you committed, in fear that you would be punished?"

"Well—yes," said Stabber, who had been posted as to these questions by Dicks.

"And you came to this city and turned out a vagabond."

"Couldn't help it."

"Umph!" said the captain, "and was the companion of thieves."

Stabber didn't deny it.

"You and an old woman, Nancy Grip, had dealings together, too, eh?"

"Yes, she gave me a lodging, and—"

"I understand. Now, then, what proof have you to offer me that you are John Brandon, the son of the dead millionaire?"

"Millionaire!" cried Stabber, taken aback.

"Yes. Did not Dicks tell you you were the heir to a million by the death of your father?"

For a moment Stabber made no reply.

This discovery that Dicks had deceived him, silenced him.

Then he made up his mind.

"Oh, yes, yes," he said, "there was a small legacy."

"He wanted to surprise you," said the captain.

"And he did," was Stabber's answer, as he added to himself, "and I'll surprise him before this job's ended."

"To the point," said the captain. "What evidence have you to show that you are the son of my old friend?"

This was another stumper for Stabber. He had no evidence other than the instructions he had received from Dicks.

"Well, you see, captain," he said, at length, "I didn't know—in fact I only met Dicks this morning, and haven't had a chance. I can bring you proofs. I have got 'em at my lodgings—"

"At Nancy Grips'?"

"No—oh, no. I haven't seen her in months. I can see you again; there is no hurry about it, you know."

"I think there is, for next week I sail for England, and I want the matter settled before I go."

"Next week?"

"Yes. Your father died in the city of Mexico, and named me as one of his executors. To me was assigned the task of finding his renegade son, and, under certain restrictions to, by proper legal process, give him his own."

"A million of dollars!" repeated Stabber.

"Yes, in estate and money. Can you bring me satisfactory proofs that you are John Brandon within two days?"

"Certainly—certainly I can. There's no doubt about that."

"How long have you known this Kennard Dicks?"

"A year or two."

"No longer?"

"It may be. He was very kind to me—helped me in my troubles."

"Lent you money?"

"Yes," said the lying Stabber.

"It was very kind of him. He is a rich man."

"A reg'lar nabob, sir," was Stabber's answer.

The captain arose from his seat, and coming around from behind the table, stood confronting Stabber.

"Do you know what I think?"

"No, sir—of course—"

"I'll tell you," said the captain, sternly; "I think John Brandon the son of my old friend, should have the proof of his identity always with him."

"Why?" began Stabber.

"But perhaps in the excitement of your new-found fortune you, being John Brandon, may have forgotten it?"

"Forgotten?" repeated Stabber, blindly.

"Yes—forgotten that if you are John Brandon, there is on your shoulder a long, inefaceable scar caused by a burn received in your boyhood, and that just below that scar is a brand in India-ink, made by a sailor who was a visitor at your father's, just before you disappeared from home. The brand is simply the letter B. Show me your shoulder?"

Stabber fairly writhed.

"Curse the infernal idiot!" muttered he, as he saw that the game was up.

"Really I—" he stammered—"I can give you—"

"That will do. Either show me your shoulder—prove to me that you are John Brandon,"—here the captain took up the pistol, "or I will ring for a servant, have a policeman summoned and you arrested. From the first I have suspected you and that fellow Dicks were playing with me. Your actions and appearance confirm my suspicion. Show me that you are John Brandon, or you go from here to a cell in the Tombs."

Stabber pale as an image of snow, trembled.

CHAPTER XXX.

BULLSEYE PLAYS THE PART OF RED LEARY AT THE HOSPITAL—THE DEAD WOMAN'S LETTER—A SURPRISE—"HOCUSSED, BY SATAN!"

MR. BULLSEYE was by no means lacking in confidence. He felt sure that he had only to present himself to the surgeon of the hospital, tell his story and march off in triumph.

He had succeeded in baffling, as he thought, the vigilance of the detective, Gimblet, and was particularly well pleased with the brilliant exploit of having carried off the goods of Red Leary under the very nose of the sharp-eyed waiting and watching detectives.

When he arrived at the hospital the surgeon happened to be out.

"When will he be back?" asked Bullseye.

"In half an hour," was the reply of one of the assistants.

"Guess I'll wait."

"Did you wish to see anyone of the patients?"

"Um—no," said Bullseye, carelessly seating himself.

Bullseye waited. Nearly an hour elapsed before the surgeon returned.

"You are the surgeon?" said the ruffian, rising from his seat and trying to look as honest as the natural villainy of his countenance would permit.

"I am," was the reply; "what is your business with me?"

"Well sir, I understand you wanted to see me."

"To see you?"

"Yes. Mr. Kennard Dicks told me that—"

"Oh," interrupted the surgeon, giving him a sharp look. "You are the bill-poster?"

"Yes, sir. I am Red Leary, as the boys call me."

"Ah!" The surgeon placed his hat upon the table, fumbled over his books and papers a moment, and then added: "Well, I have a message for you—a package to deliver—"

At this instant one of the assistants appeared at the door and beckoned to him.

The surgeon went to him, and the two held a whispered conference.

Bullseye watched this movement as he did everything that occurred around him, with a special idea of his own safety.

The surgeon presently returned to the table opposite the pretended Leary.

"So you are Mr. Leary, the bill-poster?"

"That's me, sir," replied the unabashed Bullseye.

"You were somewhat acquainted, were you not, with Mrs. Nancy Grip?"

"Me, yes; I did her some favors. She was a nice old gal, sir."

"Old gal?"

"Oh, you see that's wot we called her for short. But we all liked her, and we all of us did everythin' we could to make her comfortable. She got to bein' very poor, she did, sir," said Bullseye.

"Yes, I suppose so," said the surgeon. "Well, as to

this package, which, on her death-bed, she requested me to deliver to you."

"Yes, sir; that's wot Mr. Dicks said."

"By the way, he must have seen you very soon after he left here."

"Yes. You see I was a stickin' up a job of Mr. Sheeters, for a show in the Bowery, w'en Mr. Dicks came along and told me 'bout it, so thinkin' it was suthin that must be tended to at once, specially as it concerned Nancy, I jerked off my overhauls and came straight here."

"Yes—exactly—very kind of you. How long before Nancy Grip met with the mishaps that brought her to the hospital was it when you saw her last?"

"Lemme see?" Bullseye made a pretence of thinking of it. In reality he was saying to himself "cuss old Nance. I wonder wot sort of a ghost story he wants. The last time I seed her, I'm thinking, I gave her a biff on the side of the head."

Bullseye, however, found his ghost story.

"Lemme see?" he said, to the surgeon, "it was—it was about a month ago, an' she was very poorly then, and I kinder thought she was a little out of her head."

"She was found lying by a fence near a notorious thieves' den—Joss' Corner."

"You don't say—poor gal—dropped on herself in a pit, I s'pose?"

"No. She had evidently received a severe beating from some ruffian. She was terribly bruised. The worst was a deep gash on the side of her head; the blow had fractured the skull."

"That's where the cap'n belted her with the chair," said Bullseye to himself.

"She seemed to be particularly anxious to see Mr. Dicks."

"Yes, the cap'n, I mean Mister Dicks, liked her very much. He doted onto her, sir."

"Do you know where she lived?"

"Wen?"

"Lately—within the past few weeks?"

"Well, boss, that's more'n I could tell you. I seen her every day or two but she sorter didn't stay long in one place. She was queer. She had a kind of first of May fever, an' moved often."

The surgeon smiled gravely. Then turning to a desk, he drew out one of the drawers and took from it a sealed envelope.

Bullseye's eyes fairly snapped with delight.

He felt that his little game was won. The surgeon still held the envelope in his hand as if loth to deliver it.

"Well, I suppose it is all right—if you are the bill-poster, Mr. Leary?"

"There can't be much of a if 'bout it, sir," said Bullseye in an eager tone, reaching out his hand to grasp the coveted prize.

"If you are Mr. Leary," the surgeon repeated, "and so far as I can judge there is no doubt of it—by the way, would you care to permit me to know the contents of this sealed message? It might possibly—"

At this instant one of the assistants entered and whispered in the ear of the surgeon. Bullseye figeted uneasily in his seat. He inwardly cursed the assistant for this interruption at the very moment he was on the point of receiving the envelope.

"I will attend to it at once," said the surgeon.

Then turning to Bullseye, and as he did so motioning the assistant to retire, he said: "You will please wait a moment, Mr. Leary. A patient was a moment since brought in and requires immediate attention. I'll not keep you long." He placed the envelope carelessly in the side pocket of his coat among a few other letters and memoranda. "There's a daily paper," the surgeon hurriedly added, "to pass the time with," and then he hastily stepped toward the door.

Bullseye gritted his teeth. He began to be as nervous as a hardened ruffian like him could, over this delay.

"I say," he said, calling after the surgeon, "you—you forgot to give me the letter. I kin be reading it while you're out. That'll save time."

The surgeon paused on the threshold of the door.

"Oh, yes," he said, "certainly," and as he spoke he hastily drew out a letter from the pocket. "Here it is."

Bullseye reached up his hand and his fingers closed upon the coveted letter. The surgeon was gone.

Bullseye held the letter up and glanced at the direction written upon it.

"Curse the luck!" he exclaimed, "he has given me the wrong letter—this isn't directed to Leary. Now I must wait, instead of skipping out quietly with no more trouble about it. I've a suspicion the infernal Sawbones did it a purpose."

There was no help for it. Bullseye had the "job" to finish, and finish it he must.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes he waited with the same restless, feverish impatience with which he once, not many years before, sat in the prisoners' pen in court, waiting for a jury's verdict upon a case of burglary, whereof he was the perpetrator.

He thought of that time as he sat there in the surgeon's office. He thought, too, that the verdict came at last—"guilty!"

Now, that letter was the verdict.

Even while this past scene in his lawless career was revived in his mind, the door opened and the surgeon entered. Behind him came another person.

"Doctor, you made a mistake; you gave me the wrong—" At that moment he caught sight of the man following the surgeon.

It was the real Leary, Red Leary, the bill-poster. Bullseye paled, but his eyes glistened with rage. He controlled himself, however, as well as he could.

"I kept you waiting," said the surgeon, "a little longer than I intended. The wrong letter—ah, yes. It was accidental, but so much the better, my fine fellow."

"Hocussed, by Satan!" muttered Bullseye.

"The strangest thing—almost as if it was a scene

from a melodrama—a friend of this person," said the surgeon, pointing to Leary, "one whom he tells me he found by accident, which is yet to be explained to me, was, while he was leading him to a place of rest, suddenly attacked by a fainting fit brought on by weakness, superinduced by over excitement. Being near this hospital he brought him here."

"Wot's all that got to do with the letter?" said Bullseye, growing desperate at finding himself so near a defeat.

"This person here," again pointing to the bill-poster, "gave me his name as Leary—the bill-poster!"

"The devil!" growled Bullseye, with his eye upon the half open door.

"He'll find you soon enough!" said Leary, confronting the ruffian. "So you're another Leary are you? Nice game, wasn't it! You look like me, don't you? You're a fine looking cutthroat to play honest, ain't you, you abominable wretch?"

Bullseye cowered before the indignant glance of the man before him; the man whom he would have sworn was lying in the damp and darkness of the vaults beneath the den at Joss' Corner.

But it was only for the moment. His brutal nature recovered its ordinary stolid defiant disposition.

The bill-poster stepped between him and the door. "I see what you're up to!" he exclaimed—"but if you get out of this before I give you leave, it'll be over my dead body, my gentle dove of a rascal!"

"I believe you to be the real Leary," said the surgeon to the bill-poster, "and the revelation you made to me concerning your friend confirms me that there is an infamous conspiracy nearing its end, and its leaders almost within the grasp of justice. Here is the letter left by the woman, Nancy Grip, for you."

The surgeon handed Leary the letter.

"The handwriting is not hers," said Leary.

"No. It was dictated by her—that is to say, the address. The letter itself is in her own handwriting."

Bullseye stood glaring savagely at one and then at the other of the two men. He felt as if he could give five years from his life to be able at that instant to murder both of them.

He saw that all there was to contend for was his own escape.

Suddenly he conceived his plan. It was a desperate alternative but it was the only one that to him seemed to promise success.

As Leary fixed his glance upon the letter which yet remained unopened, and while the surgeon's attention was partly fixed upon the bill-poster, Bullseye sprang like a famished tiger upon his prey.

The suddenness of the attack, the great strength of the ruffian, were sufficient to give him a momentary triumph.

He hurled Leary to the floor as if he were a giant tossing away a child, and sprang for the door.

His hand was upon it to throw it wide open and escape seemed certain.

As he threw it back, he uttered a howl rather than a cry of baffled rage, for facing him, club in hand, stood a stalwart policeman, who evidently was not there by accident.

"Don't be in such a hurry, my man," said the officer. "If you don't like me, there's a couple more of us outside that may suit you better."

"Curse it, it's a reg'lar plant!" exclaimed Bullseye, savagely, looking about him as if for a weapon.

"Exactly, and you're the one that's planted."

Leary had regained his feet but little the worse for his fall.

The surgeon stood calmly looking on at this, an unusual scene in the office of an hospital.

"Officer, arrest this man!"

"Precisely what I mean to do—precisely what I was sent for to do." Then to Bullseye he said: "I want you now. No nonsense. If you try any more of your rushin' tricks I'll give you a dose of club that you won't relish. Is't quiet, or is't fight?"

Bullseye held out his hands. "It ain't no use a fightin' a lot of cowards—four or five to one. Then put 'em on."

The officer gave a rap on the door-casing with his club. Two other officers appeared behind him in the passage.

Bullseye yielded, and the officer who had barred his escape snapped the steel handcuffs upon his wrists.

Bullseye was a prisoner for the fifth time in his life. But this time in the grip of the law for an attempt to work out the rascality of another.

"S'pose you'll let me send for a friend, who'll explain this thing, an' maybe he won't learn some of you a lesson?" said Bullseye.

"After you've had a talk with the sergeant, and 'ur got yourself rested p'raps you kin send fur your friends."

"Who is your friend?" asked one of the officers.

"You'll find out, my jolly cop, when you see Kenward Dicks!" was the surly answer.

"Oh—Dicks, eh?" said the surgeon.

Leary made a signal of silence to the surgeon. The surgeon smiled and nodded.

"Take the fellow out of this," said the surgeon to the officer. "Mr. Leary, here, will follow you shortly and enter the proper charge against him."

"All right. Come along, old fellow. You're booked."

And Bullseye was led out between two of the officers, and Leary and the surgeon were left alone in the office.

CHAPTER XXXI.

COUNTRY GIMBLET'S SPY RETURNS—HIS DISCOVERY LEADS THE DETECTIVE TO THE HOSPITAL—"YOU NEEDN'T LOOK ANY FURTHER, GIMBLET."

THE manner in which Red Leary so unexpectedly appeared at the hospital in time to baffle the designs of Bullseye is easily explained.

After leaving the door of the den at Joss Corner, with the new-found Kenward Dicks, who, from the past half hour's excitement, had fallen into a relapse, and was growing weaker at almost every step, he slowly made his way toward his garret lodgings, little dreaming that it had been stripped of everything it contained.

When he had reached the corner of Frankfort street, nearly opposite the old Park Hospital, Dicks fainted outright, and would have fallen to the pavement had not Leary caught him in his arms.

Assisted by an officer who happened to be on duty inspecting the condition of the apples on a fruit stand Dicks was taken to the hospital.

This was the patient the surgeon was called out to see, when he was on the point of giving the letter to Bullseye.

While reviving Dicks from his exhaustion, Leary gave the surgeon the name of his patient. This of course led to a brief explanation to the surgeon, who in turn informed Leary that his counterpart, in Bullseye, was in the office waiting to get the letter intended by Nancy Grip for the bill-poster.

As Bullseye was being led to the station at the Tombs, and while the surgeon was having a conference over the strange events that had led to so good a result, Mr. Gimblet waited for the coming of his spy—the boy.

Three hours passed, until, when finally Gimblet had given up all hope of his return, he saw the boy returning.

He rubbed his hands gleefully.

"He moves as slow as a funeral," said Gimblet to himself.

The boy came slowly up. Evidently he was tired.

"Well, bub," said Gimblet. "You're back at last."

"Wish I hadn't gone," said the boy.

"Why—didn't you have an easy time, eh?"

"Easy time. You may think so, but I don't."

"Did you follow them?"

"I couldn't foller the cart. One of the fellers got out—the big feller, and loafed along a keeping his eye out as if he was afraid of bein' follered. The other feller drove off the cart as if he was a running a race. So I done the best I could and watched the big feller."

"Well—well?"

"Well, he went slouchin' about up one street and down another, a stoppin' most every block a gittin' outside of a lot of beer, until he met another fellow that I saw a speakin' to him afore the cart was drove off from here."

"Ah, ha! good, boy, good, good," said Gimblet. "Well?"

"After this big feller and the well-dressed feller had a lot of chin together, the big fellow went away an' I followed him till I saw him go up the steps into the Park Hospital. Then I giv it up an' come back."

"The Park Hospital?"

"Yes, sir."

"Umph! Yes—exactly—some friend of his there—sick. I'll see. Now, bub, you've done your work well—like a little major—here's your pay."

Gimblet handed him a dollar.

"You've earned it, my boy. Always earn your money as honestly as you have now and nobody'll ever have to send a boy to follow you."

"I say, mister, when'll you want me agin?"

"It'll be a long time before I will want you, I hope. Why do you ask?" said Gimblet, anxious to get away.

"Cause when you do," answered the boy, looking intently at the green bill in his hand, "it'll be silver dollars for the job."

"Eh?"

"I ain't a taking bootmaker's immertations of green-backs now," and he held up the bill.

"Eh—what—bootma—let me see."

Gimblet took the bill. One look was sufficient. He laughed, and thrusting it into his pocket, took out another.

"That's my mistake. Here's what I intended to give you, my boy."

The boy took the bill and gave it a close inspection.

"This isn't another kid, is it?"

"No, no, that's all right."

"If it isn't the cheese I'll foller you close as I did that big feller, you bet."

Gimblet patted him on the back and left him standing there examining his newly earned dollar.

The last he saw of him as he was turning the corner, the boy was surrounded by a dozen of his chums to whom he was relating his adventure, and, no doubt, boasting of the bonanza he had struck.

Gimblet made a bee line for the hospital.

"I'll pipe that fellow if it keeps me out for the next month. He's in with that Dicks, and Dicks and the bill-poster are pals in some underhand bizness if they ain't in the diamond job. I feel it in my bones that this big ruffian'll lead me to the opening out of the secret of that robbing, and, perhaps, to some other big lay they're up to. There's a gang of 'em, an' it won't be long before some of 'em git mad over too short allowance, and kick out of the traces. There ain't no honor 'mong thieves anyhow. It's all humbug."

So he went on, planning and re-planning, and turning the matter over in his mind until he reached the hospital, and ascended the narrow outside stairs.

On the platform he halted a moment and looked down at the busy throng passing and repassing through the park and the square beyond.

"If all them people that's rushin' about as if every one of 'em was adoing the entire bizness of the city by contract, that deserved having the nippers snapped over their wrists, I wonder how many of 'em I'd be runnin' loose?"

With this reflection on the honesty of his fellow-citizens he entered the hospital door and knocked at the door of the office.

The door was opened, and the doctor stood before him.

"Well, sir. Oh, why, Gimblet, it's you, is it? What can I do for you?"

"Not so much as I can do for myself, if I can get the chance. Are you busy?"

"Well, yes. D'ye want anything in my line?"

"No; it's something in my line, doctor, and something that may lead up to somebody having another sort of line around his neck. Was there a big chap here within an hour or so to see you or here on any visit to anybody in the wards?"

The surgeon looked at him, still keeping the door nearly closed, and standing in the narrow opening so that all view of the interior was effectually barred.

"What is the party's name you are looking for?"

"He has half-a-dozen for all I know. One of his names is Bullseye. He's pretty well known to us."

"By us—you mean the detectives?"

"You've hit it, doctor."

"You needn't look any further, Gimblet. The man you're after is safe. You needn't look any further for him."

"Eh! Is he in the office?" cried Gimblet, trying to peer in over the shoulder of the surgeon.

"No, he is in the station at the Tombs!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Gimblet. "One, for you, doctor."

"Wait a moment. Gimblet, and excuse me if I close the door."

The surgeon closed the door, leaving Gimblet on the outside. As there was just then nobody in the hall-way, he bent his head down, and applied his eye to the key-hole.

But the key was in the lock on the inside, and he saw nothing.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE GAME IS UP, THE FOX IS HOLED, AND WE CAN CALL IN THE DOGS—THE HAND OF FATE.

GIMBLET did not have to wait long.

The door opened, and the surgeon said, "come in."

To his utter astonishment there sat the very man, who, next to Bullseye, he had been anxious to trace to his hiding-place—Red Leary, the bill-poster.

"So help me!" he inwardly ejaculated, "wonders is the order of the day. Fates' gittin' to be a sort of Barnum in givin' astonishin' side-shows."

"Gimblet, this is Mr. Leary. Take a seat. You're just the man we want. I think we've got a job for you."

Gimblet nodded to Leary, and as he sat down, said in answer, "Well, I hope it'll turn out pleasant, that's all."

"Shall I tell Mr. Gimblet the history of this matter so that he may better understand—"

"Tell him? of course—yes," interrupted Leary.

The surgeon stepped to the door, and opening it, called out.

An assistant came.

"Unless it is for something specially important do not call me for half an hour," said the surgeon, "and tell the nurse who is with that case of fainting to be careful and also to come to me at the expiration of that half hour."

"All right, sir."

The door was closed and locked.

"Now we will not be interrupted until we are through with this dissection of villainy," said the surgeon.

"Now Mr. Gimblet, listen to Mr. Leary's statement, first."

"What sort of a fairy tale is this pal going to give me, I wonder," thought Gimblet.

Leary briefly and in his honest, straightforward way told the story of his midnight adventure at the Joss' Corner den; his being thrown into the vault and his escape and rescue of the real Kennard Dick from the hands of the gang of river thieves who had immured him in what would soon have been his tomb.

For once Gimblet found that sharp a detective as he was, he had been on the wrong scent in believing—for he still stuck to it that he never suspected anybody—in Leary's complicity in the robbery of Charles Didier of the package of diamonds.

"Now," said Leary, "the hand of fate is in this—for the very weakness of that poor victim of the ruffian's who now lies in this hospital, a weakness brought on him by their cruelty, was the means of bringing him and myself here when face to face I met the tool of the captain of the river gang, who is not only a robber but a murderer. I came here just in the nick of time. Five minutes later and this letter," holding it up in his hand, "would have been in the hands of one of the villains, and in the hands of his master, the captain, and owner of Joss' Corner an hour later. This letter, scrawled as it is, and blotted, was written by Nancy Grip in this hospital a few hours before her death. Read it, Mr. Gimblet."

"I ain't a detective. I'm nothing," said Gimblet, as he took the letter. "There is a better and a surer detective at the head of the force than all of us, and that is—Providence."

When he had finished reading the letter—and he did it not without difficulty, for he was unaccustomed to that sort of labor, he leaped to his feet and fairly danced, waving the letter above his head as if it were a banner of triumph.

"The game's up," he cried, "and we can call in the dogs. The fox is holed—and I'll have his brush."

"We, you mean—or rather Mr. Leary."

"Call me Red Leary the bill-poster—that suits me better."

"Leary, you'er a brick. I forgive you for making me think you as big a scoundrel as Kennard Dicks."

"Which Dicks?" asked Leary smiling.

"The other Dicks, he means," answered the surgeon.

"Now, see here, I'm got the plan all right, here," said Gimblet, tapping his head, and then laying the letter on the table.

"Well," said Leary.

"This rascally Kennard Dicks, that cut such a swell, is waiting for this Bullseye to return, bringing with him this letter. But he's too sharp to wait more than a reasonable time. I read him all the way through now—as well as you have, Leary; all the way through. While he is waiting, we must act. It ain't no use waiting any longer."

"You understand the letter?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Before dark I propose to have those diamonds, unless he's sold them; to have Charles Didier out of his hands, and to have him, the arch rascal of the gang, in the Tombs."

"Hadn't we better wait a day or two?"

"No—not an hour before we begin the work that will wind up his career."

"And so will end in shame and under the scaffold within the walls of the Tombs, the life that I saved from ending in the dark waters of the river months ago," murmured Leary.

"First, send word to the Tombs and prevent this ruffian Bullseye from sending any message to his master Kennard Dicks."

"It will be too late."

"No matter—send any how. Take the chances on that," said Gimblet. "Leave me to manage the rest. In two hours from now meet me at—what say you to—Garouses?"

"The banker's?"

"Yes."

"You will not require my presence," said the surgeon. "My duties are here you know—"

"No, Leary and myself will be sufficient."

"But, Kennard Dicks—the real Dicks—will he be sufficiently recovered to leave here?" asked Gimblet.

"Have no fear of that. He will be all right. It was only rest and proper nourishment he needed."

"Then all is right," said Leary.

The plan was all arranged, and the tap on the door given by the assistant announcing that the half hour had expired, was not a moment too early.

The surgeon opened the door.

"A new case just in, sir—fell through a hatchway—dying, sir."

"I'll be there at once."

Leary, the bill-poster, and Gimblet, went out together.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KENNARD DICKS, ALIAS JOHN BRANDON, ON THE EVE OF SUCCESS—THE BURNING OF JOSS' CORNER—THE GHOST IN THE ATTIC—A STRANGER—"SHOW HIM UP."

WAITING, every moment, in his half-angry impatience, seeming to stretch into hours, Kennard Dicks, sometimes sitting, and sometimes pacing his room back and forth like a caged hyena, was in that agony of doubt which none may know, save those who are on the eve of the accomplishment of great schemes, or of seeing them come to naught.

The million dollars inheritance of John Brandon, the possession of the letters of the dead Nancy Grip, the contents of which might be a death-blow to his hopes, the fear that his confederates in the den at Joss' Corner might at any moment prove treacherous, and the awful shadow that day and night haunted him—the shadow of the one fearful crime of his life—the shadow that might lift, only to leave him under the dangling rope of the scaffold—all these were terrible in their weight.

If Stabber, the barkeeper, failed in deceiving Captain Seaweed into the belief that he was John Brandon, then the vast inheritance would be beyond his grasp.

If Bullseye should be detected as an impostor in presenting himself as Red Leary at the hospital, by the surgeon—the last missive of Nancy Grip—he shuddered to think of what terrible revelation it would bring.

One discovery—one clue ever so slight—one false move on the chess-board of fate, and he was lost.

No wonder that as he paced his splendidly furnished sitting room he bit his lips until the blood came, and started at every sound in the hall below.

It seemed to him that by his own contrivance he had gathered, for that day alone, the threads of his fate, which, within the hour, a hand stronger than his own, a will more potent than human will, would take up and weave a net to enmesh him beyond escape.

"Curse the luck," he muttered, "why did I trust these men with such work? After all, the wisest man is but a fool when he plays for great stakes with his wisdom as his winning card. Bah, it'll be all right. There is no reason why they should fail. That surgeon, he will not, cannot suspect the trick, and as for Stabber—well, Seaweed is not as shrewd as he might be. Pshaw! all will be right. I'll drink. Brandy will quiet my nerves, and with the aid of a cigar I will wait more patiently. The end, whatever it may be, will be better than this doubt—this racking suspense."

He filled a wine-glass with the liquor and drank it. Then, lighting a cigar, he threw himself upon a lounge, and as he smoked and watched the blue vapor float up into the air toward the ceiling in rings and broken clouds, he managed to become somewhat more restful.

To him, as partially calmed and lying there, the curling smoke seemed to assume, with each puff, new shapes, and weave itself into strange combinations, resembling, the closer he watched them, the shapes and aspects of life.

Once, as it floated up from his cigar, the sinuous vapor, out of its waves in the motionless air of the quiet room, grew into a form resembling in outline a scaffold, a thin line of the smoke stretching up like a hangman's cord to the cross-beam, while beneath, a puff of it disengaged from that above, for an instant seemed to fashion itself into the semblance of a man, shadowy, weird, yet definable.

He leaped from the lounge and threw the cigar from him.

The calmness, the patience were gone again.

Again he paced the room, now pausing to listen, now for the hundredth time looking at the time, the slow-moving hands on the little French clock on the mantel, and then muttering curses upon the ruffians who were waited for.

Still they came not.

But one did come; one he did not expect—one of the river gang, out of whose desperate work he had gained thousands of dollars.

He heard the ring of the door-bell.

"Ah, now for Bullseye or Stabber!" he said, as for the moment, even though he knew not what their story would be, he felt relieved.

He heard the servant coming up. The door opened.

It was not Stabber, nor was it Bullseye. Dicks uttered an oath.

"Well, curse it, what do you want, Bill?"

The man advanced, stood silently regarding Dicks, and for the moment made no reply. He then moved gently into the room and carefully closed the door.

"The game's up, cap'n, that's wot brings me here," he said, with a surly sort of deference in his tone, and with his eyes fixed upon the bottle of brandy on the marble-topped table.

"Game's up!" exclaimed Dicks. "What do you mean?"

"I'm dry, cap'n; words stick like cotton in my mouth."

"Take a swallow of that brandy, then."

"I'll take half a dozen swallows, cap'n," said the man, filling a water goblet nearly half full of the liquor and swallowing it as if it were merely a glass of water. "Ah-ha! that's something like. Now I kin talk. Cap'n, I'm tired. I'll sit down." He did sit down, in an easy-chair.

Then he repeated the words, "the game's up, cap'n, and we're all hoccussed!"

"Speak out!" exclaimed Dicks.

"You know—don't you, part of it?"

"I know nothing of what you mean."

"Didn't you read the paper this morning?"

"No."

"Then you don't know—though it's a wonder Stabber or Bullseye didn't tell you."

"They never read," replied Dicks, shortly; "out with your story."

"Well, Joss' Corner is burned down!"

"What!" cried Dicks.

"Fact, cap'n. Nothing left of it but ashes and a pile of stones."

"Bill—is—was—did—"

"Oh—I see what you're drivin' at. The birds you had in the two cages—eh? They're roasted. There was nothing that wasn't baked in them vaults. Down there under all that fire it must have been wus than a oven fur heat."

"Thank the fates for that!" exclaimed Dicks. "Leary burned—that other one sharing his fate—good, good. Now I am Kennard Dicks beyond all human dispute!" and as he muttered these words with a savage grin of exultation upon his features, he drank down a brimming glass of the brandy.

"Yes, cap'n, Joss' Corner's gone, an' I don't think what was fastened up into it 'll ever be able to tell any tales—not much."

"How did it catch?"

"Hey?" said the ruffian.

"How did it originate?"

"Ory—ginit? No; twasn't that, ner dynimit ner powder—it wasn't blowed up. It was set a-fire by somebody, that's certain."

"No matter. Have you any more such good, bad news, Bill?"

"Um—no, cap'n, 'ceptin—'ceptin—"

"Excepting what?" interrupted Dicks, impatiently.

"Ceptin, cap'n, that I'm clean broke—ain't had a cent in—in two days."

"Come to me to-night and I will give you money."

"All right, cap'n."

"Well, take another drink, go, and come to-night. Stop, I have an errand you can perform as well as anybody. It is to deliver a note."

"Who to?"

"Mr. Garousse. The direction you will find on the envelope."

Dicks left the room and returned in a few moments.

"There's the note, leave it for him."

"Any answer?"

"No, you need not return here until evening."

"All right agin, cap'n?" and the ruffian went out and was gone.

"To-night, Charles Didier, the last of the obstacles in my path, will be gone, Leary the bill poster and Kennard Dick are burned to ashes in the vaults of Joss' Corner, why should I not defy even fate itself? And if only Stabber succeeds—ha, ha, the million will be mine, and who then will dare dispute my name or brand me as a thief, forger or murderer?"

A servant entered the room, leaving the door partly open.

Through this could be seen in the hall two or three others peering anxiously in. The one who came in was his own housekeeper.

"Well, Hannah."

"Oh, sir—we—I—the cook and the housemaid and your coachman—"

"What is the matter with you—out with it."

"We've stood it as long as we can, sir—but—but—"

"Norah, are you out of your senses?"

"Mister Dicks, there's something wrong, nights, in the attic, sir, which you know is always locked, because you keep the key of the staircase that leads up to it?"

Dicks glanced at the woman savagely.

"And our sleeping rooms are, you know, right under it—we've heard it every night for the last three or four nights, sometimes it's groans, sometimes it's

a rumbling, and once we, all of us heard that—thought it was trampin' of feet as if men were a carryin' some-thin' heavy between them. Last night it was all them noises together!"

"You're a set of fools. If you'd sleep at nights instead of lying awake listening you'd have heard nothing."

"But it kept us awake and—"

"There, that's enough, go about your work. I'll find out what the noise is—it's probably rats—"

"Oh, no, sir, it—it's—"

"Go. If I hear another complaint I'll discharge the one that makes it. D'y'e hear, go."

The woman Norah hesitated, then turned and went out, closing the door after her.

"Curse their prying nature! never mind, to-morrow night they'll hear nothing. The ghosts will no longer trouble them."

"A gentleman would like to see you," said a servant, entering.

"The name?"

"He gave none, he said it was important business, sir."

"Is he anyone you have ever seen here before?"

"No, sir."

"It may be Garousse. Is it an elderly person?"

"No, dark hair, sir, and well dressed."

"Well, I'll see him. Show him up. Anything to kill time."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

STABBER TURNS TRAITOR—THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

STABBER, the Joss' Corner barkeeper, whom we left in the presence of Captain Seaweed, pale and trembling, and feeling that he was completely baffled in his attempt to personate John Brandon, was not permitted to sit long in silence.

The captain confronted him with that pistol; the door was locked.

Stabber, a villain of the cowardly type, sitting there, saw but one way of escape.

That way was suggested by his fear.

The stern, unyielding look of the captain, and his evident determination to do precisely what he said, was sufficient.

Stabber believed in self-preservation, and the inborn scoundrelism of his nature prompted him to save himself from harm even though he betrayed, in doing it, his best friend.

"Well, have you decided?" said the captain, toying with the pistol, and with his clear, piercing glance losing not a movement or an expression upon Stabber's face. "Show me upon your shoulder the scar and the hand beneath it, or—"

"Captain," interrupted Stabber, "I'll make a clean breast of it. It isn't in me to deceive anybody. I—I—was forced into trying this here game. I'm poor, cap-tain, but I've got a character."

"Oh, ho! That's the way the wind sets, my man, eh? I had a suspicion from the first that I was to be wrecked by some such hidden rock. So, so!"

"You see, captain," said Stabber, gathering courage, "you see, this Mister Dicks, knowing I was out of work and had a wife and five children to support—I'm very poor, captain—comes to me an' gits me to do this job, promisin' me big boodle for it, and as I've been out of work ever since the strike, why I—"

"You sold yourself. You made a strike at me. Do you know why sailors never strike on shipboard for higher wages?—I'll tell you. If they strike, its mutiny, and that means a hanging match at the yardarm. Now, then, tell me the truth—confess the whole game. Unload your cargo clear down to the ballast—but no humbug—no luffing on me, d'y'e understand?"

Stabber did; and after repeating his awful stretcher about his being out of work, and the suffering of his imaginary family, told the truth—as nearly as a treacherous scoundrel could—concerning his bargain with Kennard Dicks.

The captain uttered a long whistle, and then laughed outright.

"A nice beacon to steer by," said the captain.

"Well, I've got all your cargo, have I?"

"All I know, sir," said Stabber, "and now I s'pose I can go, eh?"

"Yes. No, stop. I've an idea. You remain here. In an hour I want you to go with me to this land-shark's house."

"Eh?" cried Stabber, who didn't relish the idea of meeting Dicks, after having sold him so shamefully.

"You heard me. I mean it. Never fear, he won't harm you; besides, I'll pay you for your treachery to him, and take good care that you don't try it on me."

Stabber assented. He was fast—and he made the best of a bad bargain.

He saw, too, that the captain's wrath was directed towards Dicks; towards the master and not the tool.

"And after I've scuttled this little game of this master of yours, I'll go with you to where you live, and see what sort of stowage your family has, and put them in better sailing trim."

This was another stumper for Stabber. He inwardly cursed the captain as heartily as he had a little while before cursed his luck in being caught in such a predicament.

"You shan't suffer," were the captain's words, as with Stabber he left the hotel for the house of Kennard Dicks, "and to-night your wife and children 'll have the best supper they've had in a year."

Stabber involuntarily uttered a groan.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the captain.

"Oh, nothin'," answered Stabber, with a sickly attempt to fashion his features into the semblance of a smile—"nothing, only a sudden pain, but it's gone now."

"We'll stop on the way and take in a ration—pipe all hands for grog—eh, my honest man?"

And they did stop—twice, greatly to the satisfaction

of Stabber, who needed something of that sort to brace up his courage—what little of that necessary attribute of manhood he possessed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GETTING THE WARRANT—THE PLAN ARRANGED—LEARY'S NEXT JOB AT BILL-STICKING.

THE real Kennard Dicks, with Red Leary and Gimblet, the detective, proceeded at once from the hospital to the residence of Garousse the banker.

A servant answered the bell.

"Mr. Garousse is not at home."

"Are you sure?" asked Gimblet.

The servant, who knew the detective from having seen him during his visits to the banker's, replied:

"I am sure, Mr. Gimblet, because when he is in he is always at home to you. He has just gone."

"How soon will he return?"

The servant did not know, and only said that "Mr. Garousse had received a note from a messenger—a rough-looking man—who said he was from Mr. Dicks, and no answer was wanted."

The servant closed the door, and the party descended the steps.

"He is gone to where we are going—to the house of this infamous scoundrel. We will meet him there," said Gimblet.

"There'll be torment in that wretch's soul if I can put it there," said the real Dicks.

"Soul!" said Leary. "The only one he's got is on the bottom of his foot."

After arranging their plan of action, the three men, so lately and so unexpectedly brought together, proceeded to the Tombs police court, where Gimblet procured the necessary warrant for the arrest of Kennard Dicks, the second.

The charge upon which the justice issued the warrant will be soon made clear to the reader.

"Why did you not, weeks ago, come to me and tell me your suspicions as well as what you knew of this man, this prince of rogues?" Gimblet asked of Leary.

"Because I knew that if I did, he would escape punishment; because I knew that but half his villainy would be made known, and because I knew that I was gathering together proof after proof every day that even you could not have obtained."

Gimblet informed Leary of the fact of the removal of his household goods from his lodgings.

"We'll find them, never fear, before to-morrow's sun rises over the city," answered Leary. "Now, then, for the high-toned Kennard Dicks, the second. We are nearing his house. Three blocks more and we will be there."

"Perhaps he may not be at home," said Gimblet.

"Then we must wait for his royal highness, the prince of swindlers. We're not proud, are we, Gimblet? We've got all day before us."

It was arranged that Gimblet should be the first to enter, and the servants of the house being made aware of the legality of the proceedings, were to be used by Leary and the real Kennard Dicks in making search of the premises unknown to its master, while Gimblet was "interviewing" him in whatever room he might choose to receive him.

"I think the next job at bill-sticking I have will be—"

"What, Leary?" asked Gimblet.

"Sticking a bill on the city treasury for services as a special detective," answered Leary, with a grim smile.

"And what will be left for me?"

"Oh, you can take for your share the reward offered for the detection of the robbers who bagged Charley Didier and took from him the package of diamonds. One of them is in the Tombs now."

"That's Bullseye—the other?" said Gimblet.

"The other? We'll have him in—an hour."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GIMBLET'S CAPTURE OF "THE MAN"—"MURDERER, ROBBER, MATRICIDE"—THE CLOSING OF THE GAME—THE APPEARANCE OF CHARLES DIDIER—NANCY GRIP'S LETTER—THE TRUE JOHN BRANDON—THE POISON—THE END.

"Show him up," repeated Dicks to the servant.

Five minutes passed.

"Strange, my visitor, whoever he is, does not come up," Dicks was just proceeding to the door, when it opened, and the servant, with a scared look upon his face, ushered in the expected visitor.

Dicks started back.

The visitor was Gimblet, the detective.

"Excuse my not sending up my name," said Gimblet, bowing, "but you know that persons of my profession don't often do that sort of thing." As he said this, Gimblet, apparently as if he had no special purpose in view, closed the door.

Dicks stared at him, and then with a gesture of his hand, waved the detective to a seat.

Gimblet accepted the proffered favor, but, again, of course with no special motive apparent, lifted the rep cushioned chair to a position, so that as he sat in it, he would be between Dicks and all chance of escape by the door.

"Now, sir, your business," said Dicks.

"Our mutual business, you mean," said Gimblet, in a provokingly mild tone. "Without you it could not be transacted; without me—well, it might be accomplished by somebody else."

"Stop this nonsense. What is your errand here? I know you—you are a detective. I have no time to spare."

"I know it—not a moment," said Gimblet. "I'll explain in three words."

"Very well—ten or twenty, if you like—but be brief,"

and Dicks seated himself near the table and opposite Gimblet.

"Brief it is. Mr. Kennard Dicks, I have a warrant for your arrest!"

Dicks started, his face paled, then reddened, his eyes flashed, and then, by an effort, he partially regained his composure. Gimblet's eyes were upon him, noticing every movement.

"My—my arrest. And upon what charge?" said Dicks.

"Well," replied Gimblet, carelessly placing his hand in his outside pocket, "I have the warrant ready for your inspection."

"Let me see it?" cried Dicks, rising from his seat.

Gimblet did not remove his hand from the pocket, but still keeping his eyes fixed upon Dicks, replied.

"You shall see it presently."

"Now, sir. It is my right?"

"Oh, yes. You have a right."

"What is the charge?"

"Robbery and murder!"

Dicks standing there confronting his fate, felt his face turn pale as that of a corpse. Yet he answered with something of boldness:

"I—I—Kennard Dicks, charged—a murderer and a robber!"

"Well, not exactly, there were two of you, in one."

"This is folly! I never committed any such crimes. Everyone—"

"It is folly," said Gimblet. "I arrest you for the murder of Joseph Didier and for the robbery of a package of diamonds from his brother, Charles Didier."

For a moment Dicks stood appalled, motionless.

Then flashed into his mind the thought that he yet was safe.

Was not the Joss' Corner Den burned to the ground, and with it in the vaults beneath, Red Leary and the real Kennard Dicks?

And Charles Didier, was he not safe?

What evidence was there to convict him of the double crime of robbery and murder.

His courage and self-possession came back to him as he thought of these things.

"Well, Mr. Gimblet, is there any more to be added to this farce?" he sneered: "if there is, please proceed."

"Yes, there is an addition which may increase its interest though it may not seem particularly humorous to you."

"Get through with it."

"It is a little conundrum. Do you know where I can find Charles Didier, who was last seen by Red Leary the bill-poster, entering the notorious den of Joss' Corner, at midnight?"

"I know nothing of either the boy you refer to, or of the den which you say he entered, nor do I know anything about such people as this Red Leary."

"His cheek and power of making it fit any size of out-and-out lying is immense!" said Gimblet to himself.

"Ah," said Gimblet aloud; "you didn't know any of these people, eh?"

"No sir." Dicks stepped toward a dressing bureau which stood between the windows, and his hand was already upon one of the smaller drawers, his face being still partly turned toward Gimblet.

"Stop! stop! Open that drawer if you dare!" cried Gimblet, leaping to his feet and drawing the hand from his pocket and leveling a small revolver. "You see I understand your movement. Close that drawer."

Dicks turned. There was desperation in every lineament of his face.

A low tap upon the door was heard.

"You will permit me to admit my servant?"

"No," said Gimblet, "I will do it for you, presently. You are my prisoner, resistance is useless."

"You will be sorry for this piece of work, this dragging an innocent man from his house—"

"Exactly. Now really, you say you do not know this Red Leary?"

"No; admit my servant—I expect visitors," cried Dicks savagely.

"I expect visitors too," said Gimblet, backing to the door and still covering Dicks with his pistol.

"Put down that pistol. You see I am not trying to resist this brutal arrest."

"No, but there is a pistol in that bureau drawer—that's all!"

Gimblet opened the door slightly.

"All right?" whispered a voice.

"Yes," replied Gimblet. Then he opened wide the door.

In came Leary the bill-poster.

Dicks started, and horror-stricken at the apparition of the man he supposed to be lying dead in the ruins of Joss' Corner, grasped at a chair for support, and missing it fell back upon the lounge gasping: "Curse you!"

"You see, you do know Mr. Leary."

"Yes," cried Leary, "and I know you, John Brandon! and the only blessing that I ever robbed you of was that of death, when at midnight on that lonely pier I prevented you from committing suicide."

The words fell like a knell of doom upon the ears of the appalled man who sat there upon the lounge.

"I saw you strike down Joseph Didier, saw you rob him, and bent over your dying victim, and to me his last words were uttered as you sped away in the darkness!"

John Brandon, still cowering, even in the face of this terrible disclosure, began to think.

With thought came something of the courage of desperation.

Gimblet was watching him.

"There'll be a chance for me yet," he said to himself. "That cursed detective's glance will be turned directly."

"You call yourself Kennard Dicks?" continued Leary.

"That is—that is my real name," said Brandon, "and—and I defy you to disprove it."

"Do you?" exclaimed Leary, stepping to the door. "I've a witness here you won't dispute. He's as good as a three-sheet poster to fill your eye."

Leary made a sign, and the real Kennard Dicks stood before the now terror-stricken man who had so long borne his name.

"Kennard Dicks, permit me to introduce you to your special friend, Mr. John Brandon."

"And here is another particular friend will now pay his addresses to you," said Leary, looking toward the open door. "We found him bound hand and foot in a dark store-room in the attic of this house."

Leaning upon the arm of one of the servants, came in Charley Didier, thin and pale with the torture of his confinement.

John Brandon saw that his career was ended. At the very moment when he thought he had overcome every obstacle, ruin and disgrace, and a felon's fate, like grim specters, were ready to send him to his doom.

Trembling, ghastly, and voiceless he sat there. There was no longer thought of resistance.

At this supreme moment the sound of a bell, and the opening and closing of the front door were heard. The sounds aroused him a little from the torpor of terror into which he had fallen.

Leary stepped out into the hall.

Three men were coming up the stairs.

Two of them he recognized. It was Stabber, the barkeeper. The one he did not recognize was Captain Seaweed. The other whom he knew was Garousse, the banker.

They came up silently.

Leary met them at the head of the stairs.

"You wish to see Mr. Kennard Dicks?"

"I do," said Captain Seaweed, "if the scoundrel is in."

"There is no scoundrel by the name of Kennard Dicks. There is a murderer just now arrested in this house of the name of John Brandon, who has been known as Dicks, sir!"

The captain rushed past Leary and entered the room.

Behind him came Leary, followed by Garousse. Stabber took the opportunity of turning about and slipping out of the house before his absence was noted.

"Hal!" roared the captain, as he beheld the abject figure of the detected murderer. "Hal you're not Kennard Dicks, eh? You are John Brandon, the vagabond son of my friend. Your game of sending a rascal to personate John Brandon while you played the part of Kennard Dicks—so that you could still bear an honest name in the eyes of the world and rake in the legacy left you by your dead father—your game is played, eh? Lost the trick, didn't you? If you are John Brandon, not a cent of the million dollars will you ever touch if I can help it!"

"Be quiet one moment, captain," said Leary; "there is something more to be said. This wretch tortured me, tortured that boy, Charles Didier; tortured Kennard Dicks, and would have murdered us as remorselessly as he did that boy's brother, Joe Didier, had not heaven pointed out to us the way of escape and frustrated his schemes. Now I will torture him."

Leary drew from his pocket the letter written by Nancy Grip, and opened it.

John Brandon sat writhing upon the lounge, glancing wildly from one to the other of this group of implacable accusers, in whose faces not one look of mercy found expression.

It was Cain shrinking back in terror from the wrath of avenging Justice; Judas quivering in the presence of relentless judgment.

John Brandon might better have found his death in the river, with its dark waters as his winding-sheet, than to have lived for such a fate as this.

"John Brandon," said Leary, "the letter you sent your confederate to get, and he didn't convince the surgeon that he looked enough like me to get it, I got. I'll read this letter, so everybody may know what a precious scoundrel you are. Nancy Grip died, and her death is another murder you will have to answer for."

Then Leary read:

"The man who calls himself Kennard Dicks has no right to do so—HE IS MY SON."

The cringing figure upon the lounge uttered a cry of despair. It was the cry of a victim placed for the second time on the rack.

Leary, heedless of the cry, continued to read:

"Eight years ago, a young man was found lying upon the pavement in front of the house where I lived. He was ragged, and worn out with tramping the streets and famishing for food. I pitied him, and begged the policeman who found him to let me have him. I took him in, gave him shelter; then when he was rested he told me his story. He had robbed a friend of his father's of a sum of money and had run away from home. He told me his father was very wealthy. Three days after this he came in to my room, scarcely able to stand. He staggered to the bed upon which he slept, and the only words he uttered were, 'my heart—my heart.' That night he died. Then I made it up with my son, who did not look unlike him then, to pass for John Brandon, so that one day he might inherit the father's fortune. My son, now known as Kennard Dicks, met the real Kennard Dicks, who had just returned from Europe, last year. Here there was a break in the letter, or rather the writing was illegible. It concluded with 'my son grew tired of me, beat me, forced me to aid him in all his schemes, and to harbor his gang of river thieves of which he was the captain and leader. He was the one who robbed the boy of the package of diamonds, and he wanted the boy out of the way—recognise him—boy is in his house—diamonds in closet—third floor—I am dying—my son—beat me—kicked—NANCE—'"

"There the letter ends"—said Leary, folding it up. "And here is the package of diamonds found in the closet on the third floor. I still shall call you John Brandon," he added, "because I know it isn't much difference to you."

"Ha, stop that!" cried Gimblet, rushing toward the crouching son of Nancy Grip, "stop that!"

But he was too late. The wretched man had, even while Leary was speaking, suddenly thrust his hand into his vest pocket and drawn from it a small vial not larger around than a quill, and before Gimblet could reach him he had taken out the tiny cork and held the bottle to his nostrils.

Then, as Gimblet sprang upon him, he dashed the bottle to the floor, and the colorless liquid ran out upon the carpet.

There was an odor, penetrating, suffocating, which filled the atmosphere of the room; an odor precisely similar to that of bananas.

"Raise the windows!" cried Gimblet.

Leary ran to them and threw the sash up.

The moment he had inhaled the odor of this strange, powerful liquid, John Brandon dropped back upon the lounge.

His eyes were open and staring—his breath came slower and slower, a gasp—a sudden convulsive spasm of the muscles of the face, and the murderer, the robber and son of poor Nancy Grip had gone to his account.

Only a slight discoloration, a reddish, bloodshot tinge—scarcely noticeable in the corner of each staring, dulled eye betrayed the nature of the poison he had used.

Gimblet took up the bottle.

The label was worn by long carriage in the pocket, but the name of the liquid was plainly visible.

"POISON—NITRITE OF AMYE." The odor of which is death; one drop upon the tongue, annihilation of life and sense at once. The end had come.

Now, silently and solemnly, vengeance ceasing with his death, the group gathered around the dead body of the man who for the second time had attempted suicide, in the presence of Red Leary.

But this time he was too quick for human intervention.

And so ended the mystery of the murder on the pile, really traced to its revelation by the poor bill-poster, RED LEARY.

THE END.

CHARLES JONAS

ISMAEL:

OR,

THE DRIED-UP WELL.

"I will give thee, Ismael—my younger son, my Benjamin, all those of my goats which are blind, so that by thy care for them thou shalt learn to be loving, and pity those whom Allah hath afflicted."

"Oh, my father! and shall my elder brother, Dabol, be pleased with the bright eyes of his goats, while I may not have goats that shall see me, and bleat as they mark my coming?"

"Nay; thy blind goats will love thee the more for that they are blind, and will lick thy hands."

"Yet their eyes will not glisten in the sun, while those of the goats of Dabol shall shine like topazes in the light."

So the old sheik shook his head, saying, "Mine elder son has that which is his, and thou that art the younger hast that which I give thee. Know that the younger son bows to the elder, and that when I sleep with my fathers that Dabol is the head of all our house."

So Ismael puts his hands to his forehead, saluting his white-bearded father, and he says, "Lo! I will be content with those goats that

are blind for my portion, and when thou sleepest forever I will declare Dabol my lord and master."

So the old sheik turned him away.

He was very old, and full of authority in the tribe, though but the owner of a few herds of mountain goats, and some mountain land.

Then goes Ismael to his mother, Rebekha, saying, "Know, mother, that my father will not hearken, and gives Dabol all that is his, except such goats as are blind."

Rebekha smiles, for she loves her younger son the best, and she says, after the strange mode of Eastern speech, "All goats have eyes; but if they are proud, and look up towards the sun, the great light will dazzle them—nay, the best eyes in the world shall water if sand be cast into them."

Then Rebekha looks meaningfully at her son, and he smiles.

From that time the goats of the Sheik Giaffor frequently became blind, and thereby passed away from the old man, and were the property of Ismael, the younger son.

Dabol, the elder, was oftentimes away hunting, and climbing to the hill-tops, in order to see the world, all the wonders whereof he longed to witness.

The years went on, and Ismael held more flocks of goats than his old father, while Gabol still loved hunting.

"Nay," says Ismael, "thine age, my father, bids thee rest, and my brother Dabol still wanders from our pastures; give, then, to me thy flocks, and I will nurture thee until sleep comes!"

"Give Ismael these things," said Rebekha, "and all will be well!"

Daily, hourly, do Ismael and Rebekha persuade the old shepherd to give up his flocks.

At last he says, "I will give thee all my flocks, my younger son; but thou must promise to pay half that which they are worth to thy elder brother, Dabol."

"That do I promise; but what of thy land? Wilt not also give me thy land, my father; for of what avail are my goats and sheep if I have no land for them?"

"The land is thy brother's birthright. If thou wouldst have, thou must buy of him."

"What wants he of land who ever quits it?" urges Rebekha, who, as the years roll on, still more dearly loves her latest born.

But the old sheik was resolute. He would not give away his land from the firstborn.

At the end of three months the old man died, blessing his sons, and thanking his wife for her sweet companionship.

Dabol would not sell the land, though he had not goat nor sheep to place upon it, for only Ismael's flocks prospered—those, half of which was Dabol's, were lost in the pasturage, or were stolen, or were carried off by wild beasts of prey.

"Thou shalt rent the land at a fair price, my brother, and when I come home thou shalt give it back to me. For me, I go farther into the world, as I would have long since have gone but that my father prayed me rest."

He wandered.

"And if it please Allah to take him," whispered Rebekha, "the land will be thine."

A long year passed, and Ismael found fortune not so easy as it had been.

He was too grasping.

Lo! journeying one day in the desert, he hears a cry.

"Help! some water!"

He knows the voice—'tis Dabol's.

"Ah, is it thou, brother? Give me to drink, I pray!" cries Dabol.

"Water have I, which thou hast not; land hast thou, which I have not. Let us exchange. Thou shalt have water only if thou givest me thy land."

"Alas! of what avail is my land, if I die here of thirst? Yet wilt thou deprive me of all that I have of my father's? Well know I that thou didst blind the goats by compelling them to stare at the sun."

"'Twas fair cunning."

"Well know I that my flocks were not lost, but that secretly thou didst sell them, and kept thy own beasts."

"'Twas good trading."

"Even do I know that when thou didst prompt our father to give thee his flocks, thou wast not ignorant that he must soon die."

"I held my bargain. I fed him. What say you—the water and your life for the land, or you die, when the land becomes mine by inheritance."

"Alas! as I am, a cup of water is all the world to me. Take thou my land."

Thus it was that Ismael gained all his father's flocks and land, and Dabol went forth shorn into the world.

Five years pass, and this time it is greedy Ismael who had been traveling to collect a debt far across the desert, and is without water.

For his enemies had filled his water gourds with sand. He is reeling on his camel already, dying of thirst under that terrible sun, when at last the yearned-for object, a well—Saraman's well—shows, a white speck, in the desert.

Dried up; the well is waterless.

Ah, it is his turn!

What now is all the world to him who perishes for a draught of water?

Then his hot brain dances, and the mirage of the desert depicts his prosperous home and his countless herds peaceful in their pastures.

He knows all is fancy.

Yet the ringing camel-bell grows nearer.

"Wanderer, drink!" says a voice.

Still, though he sees the gurgling water gourd, he cannot believe it true.

Then the voice says, "Brother!"

He looks up, sees Dabol, and shrinks. He cannot hope for pity. He showed not any—no pity will be bestowed upon him.

"Drink, brother Ismael," Dabol says, more sweetly voiced than ever.

And, greedy even then, he seizes the gourd, and drinking savagely, suffocates himself, and falls upon the desert, dead!

And Dabol, the supplanted, is thereupon heir to all his brother's flocks and herds, and once more he has his land again.

- 503 Tommy Bounce, Jr., in College—comic.....
By Peter Pad
- 504 Around the World; or, Fighting to Win.....
By Harrigan & Hart
- 505 Out With the "Jeannette;" or, Two Years
Among Icebergs.....By a Herald Reporter
- 506 Captain Tom Drake; or, The Young Privateers
By H. C. Emmet
- 507 Fred Ford; or, Life at Boarding-School.....
By Captain Will Dayton
- 508 Billy Bakkus, the Boy With the Big Mouth—
comic.....By Commodore Ah-Look
- 509 Bow and Arrow Jack, the Indian Nemesis.....
By Kit Clyde
- 510 Arctic Phil, the Bear-Slayer of the Northern
Seas.....By Alex. Armstrong
- 511 Fred Baxter, the Wild Horse Tamer.....
By J. M. Travers
- 512 The Brookfield Bank Robbers.....By D. W. Stevens
- 513 The Border Bandits.....By James D. Montague
- 514 The Young Sharpshooters of the Rebellion....
By Col. Ralph Fenton
- 515 Fighting Joe; or, The Game Man of the Plains
By Kit Clyde
- 516 Invincible Bill.....By Alexander Armstrong
- 517 Skeleton Gulch; or, Captain Texas and His
Band of Vultures.....By J. R. Scott
- 518 The Irish Claude Duval as a Privateer.....
By Corporal Morgan Rattler
- 519 The Wolverine; or, The Count's Treachery....
By a Parisian Detective
- 520 Ben Bolt; or, the Young Blacksmith.....
By James D. Montague
- 521 From Drummer Boy to General.....
By Richard R. Montgomery
- 522 Bob Rollick; or, What Was He Born For—
comic.....By Peter Pad
- 523 Northwoods Tom, the Athlete Hunter.....By Kit Clyde
- 524 Only a Cabin-Boy; or, Saved by Grit.....
By Harry Rockwood
- 525 Astray in Africa.....By Walter Fenton
- 526 Tiger Ted.....By Alexander Armstrong
- 527 Barnum's Boy Ben.....By Commodore Ah-Look
- 528 The Black Mask; or, The Vow of Silence.....
By W. Hanshaw
- 529 Sou'-west Fred.....By Kit Clyde
- 530 Bob Rollick, the Yankee Notion Drummer; a
sequel to "Bob Rollick; or, What Was He
Born For?"—comic.....By Peter Pad
- 531 The Drummer Boy Spy; or, the Slaughter of
the Wilderness.....By Ralph Morton
- 532 The Black Hercules.....By Colonel J. M. Travers
- 533 Fireman Dick; or, The Pride of Number 9....
By James D. Montague
- 534 The Shortys Out For Fun—comic.....By Peter Pad
- 535 Red River Bill, the Prince of Scouts.....By J. R. Scott
- 536 Special Express Ned, the Prince of Boy En-
gineers.....By Horace Appleton
- 537 The Shortys' Christmas and New Years at
Home—comic.....By Peter Pad
- 538 The James Boys' Brides.....By D. W. Stevens
- 539 The Spies of the Delaware.....By Kit Clyde
- 540 Denver Dan, Jr., and His Band of Deadshots..
By "Noname"
- 541 The Steam Man of the Plains; or, The Terror
of the West.....By "Noname"
- 542 On Deck; or, The Boy Pilot of Lake Erie.....
By Howard De Vere
- 543 From Pole to Pole; or, The Sailor Boy Avenger
By Horace Appleton
- 544 Dick Wright and His Band of Cannibals.....
By J. R. Scott
- 545 The Boy Captain; or, The Search for a Missing
Will.....By Alexander Armstrong
- 546 Pickle and Tickle; or, Mishaps and Mischief—
comic.....By Peter Pad
- 547 Fort Hayes; or, Black Eagle, the Avenger.....
By Don Jenardo
- 548 Noiseless Nat; or, Always Just Where He's
Wanted.....By James D. Montague
- 549 The Secrets Under the Sea.....By Kit Clyde
- 550 Lazy Jake, the Boy Spy of the Rebellion.....
By Col. Ralph Fenton
- 551 Sam Sharpe at School.....By Captain Will Dayton
- 552 Privateer Tom—a sequel to "Captain Tom
Drake".....By H. C. Emmet
- 553 Frank Reade and His Steam Horse.....By "Noname"
- 554 Billy the Bootblack; or, The Trump Card Last
By Harrigan & Hart
- 555 The Rival Scouts.....By J. R. Scott
- 556 The Coral Cave; or, Paul Philip's Cruise.....
By Horace Appleton
- 557 The Army Scout; or, The Mysteries of the West
By Kit Clyde
- 558 Missouri Jack and His Band of "7".....
By James D. Montague
- 559 Lasso Luke; or, The Three Prairie Pards.....
By Kit Clyde
- 560 Shady Dell School; or, Haps and Mishaps of
Schoolboy Life.....By Captain Will Dayton
- 561 The Man of Gold; or, Under the Shadow of
Crime.....By Horace Appleton
- 562 The Mad Man of the North Pole; or, The Boy
Mazeppa of the Arctic Seas.....By Kit Clyde
- 563 Extree Nick, the New York Newsboy.....
By Commodore Ah-Look
- 564 Oath-bound; or, The Jack of Spades.....By J. R. Scott
- 565 Custer's Last Shot; or, The Boy Trailer of the
Little Horn.....By Colonel J. M. Travers
- 566 Gassy Hyde; or, The Fire-Boy Friend of Phila-
delphia.....By Corporal Morgan Rattler
- 567 Fred Hazard, the Star of the Circus.....
By Horace Appleton
- 568 Coonskin Kit, the Dashing Government Scout
By Kit Clyde
- 569 Denver Dan, Jr., and the Renegade.....By "Noname"
- 570 Billy Badger; or, The Mysterious Unknown of
the Bank Robbers' Band.....By James D. Montague
- 571 The Brand of the Desert.....By Walter Fenton
- 572 Mail-Car Ned; or, Falsely Accused.....
By Alexander Armstrong
- 573 The Maniac Pirate.....By Horace Appleton
- 574 Smokestack Bob, the Hero of the Rail.....By J. R. Scott
- 575 Nimble Nip; or, The Imp of the School—comic
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- 576 King Morgan, the Terror of the Seas.....
By Alexander Armstrong
- 577 The Convict's Oath; or, The Prisoner of Van
Dieman's Land.....By James D. Montague
- 578 The Serpent Queen; or, The Mysterious Night-
Riders of Georgia.....By Kit Clyde
- 579 The Fortune Hunters; or, Two Yankee Boys in
Australia.....By Alexander Armstrong
- 580 The Fatal Star.....By Horace Appleton
- 581 The Bootblack's Plot; or, The Mystery of a
Night.....By J. R. Scott
- 582 Huron Harry; or, The Haunted Skiff.....
By James D. Montague
- 583 Doomed; or, The Secret League of Boston....
By James D. Montague
- 584 The Maniac Rider; or, The Mystery of Hawkes-
wood Grange.....By Horace Appleton
- 585 The Gipsies' Den.....By Kit Clyde
- 586 Matt Merry; or, The Life of the School.....
By Captain Will Dayton
- 587 The Phantom Avenger; or, Dick Darling in..
Montana.....By Alexander Armstrong
- 588 Hugo, the Texan; or, The Demons of the Alamo
By J. R. Scott
- 589 Lost on the Desert; or, the Guide's Treachery
By James D. Montague
- 590 The Avengers' League.....By "Noname"
- 591 The "Sea Wave's" Last Cruise; or, The Pi-
rates' Cave.....By Kit Clyde
- 592 Cromwell's Boy Spy; or, The Roundheads and
the Cavaliers.....By Horace Appleton
- 593 The Pirate Hermit; or, The Wolf's Legacy.....
By Alexander Armstrong
- 594 Dick the Shadow; or, The Mysterious Trails of
the Backwood.....By J. R. Scott
- 595 Fighting the Redskins; or, Beaver Bill's Last
Trail.....By James D. Montague
- 596 The Black Domino; or, The Jailor of the Tow-
er.....By Kit Clyde
- 597 Frank Reade and His Steam Team.....By "Noname"
- 598 Cheeky and Chipper; or, Through Thick and
Thin.....By Commodore Ah-Look
- 599 Dead Man's Pond; or, The Black Demon of the
Sierras.....By Horace Appleton
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